MOSES

BY LAWRENCE LANGNER

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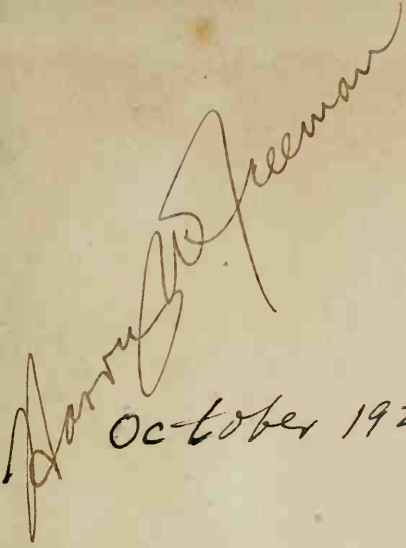
October 1924.

MOSES

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A PLAY

A PROTEST AND A PROPOSAL

BY

LAWRENCE LANGNER

BONI AND LIVERIGHT
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MOSES

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To
ALICE RAPHAEL ECKSTEIN

INTRODUCTION

The old clown Jackson in Andreyev's play, "He Who Gets Slapped," admonishes the new clown He, who attempts to amuse the circus audience by an intellectual quip on the subject of religion, in the following words:

"My friend . . . your speech was a sacrilege. Politics—all right! Manners—as much as you please! But Providence—leave it in peace! And believe me, friend, I shut your mouth in time."

Theatres are not so very different from circuses. Twenty years ago the theatrical managers, in their superior wisdom, were using almost the same words as Jackson with reference to plays which frankly discussed the problems of sex; yet today there is hardly a phase of this subject which is not dealt with freely in the theatre. Plays based upon religious subjects have usually been produced by the managers only when they were plays which glorified the scriptural figures in the way the clergy wished them to be glorified, and such plays have seldom been either popular or profitable, since they did not appeal to the usual theatre-goer, while the people to

whom they might have appealed usually preferred a confirmation of their beliefs from behind the pulpit, rather than from behind the footlights. Indeed, the small minority which still regards the Bible as the unadulterated word of God also regards the theatre as the particular field of the Devil, and is not at all interested in acting versions of the Scriptures.

Moses in the Theatre

The theatre is advancing. Any subject which bears an important relation to our life has its place in the theatre so long as it is expressed in terms of the theatre. Religion has made and ruined civilisations; overturned empires; thrust proud kings from their thrones; burned men and women at the stake; and given the martyr faith to withstand the flames. And plays which represent a nonconforming viewpoint on religion cannot be kept off the stage merely to avoid hurting the feelings of those people whose emotional reactions destroy their capacity for dispassionate thought; they should simply be warned to stay away when such plays are given.

The subject of Moses bears an extremely important relation to modern life, and one that can be far better expressed in terms of the theatre than in terms of the church; for while the church is hostile to new views on old subjects, the theatre welcomes them, which is not the least of the reasons why the churches are commonly empty, while the

theatres are usually full. Indeed, Moses or any other scriptural figure is entitled to whatever place in the theatre the dramatist is able to give him, since our vigorous modern drama is indebted to religion for its very existence, and can best repay the debt to its enfeebled parent by imparting some of its vitality to the anemic interpretations of the Scriptures now propounded under the horrible label of modern scientific religion.

It is a rule of the theatre that a play which deals with an historical character must reckon with the preconceptions of its audience. We no longer accept Moses as a man, though we give him no attribute of divinity; he has become a tradition, a legendary figure. And if we examine his writings to unearth the personality beneath them, we find that he often exposed his vices under the mistaken impression that they were virtues. Our preconceptions of his character are based, not upon the actual life of Moses as told in the Old Testament, but upon the amazing results of his teachings upon humanity. Fortunately for him, Moses could not possibly have known that millions upon millions of people, over three thousand two hundred years after his death, would still be accepting the majority of his principles at his own valuation of them; had he known it, he would probably have been so fearful of the effect of what he taught, that he would never have dared to teach anything at all.

The Influence of Moses

Civilization has reached its present state like the unrolling of a great oriental carpet, whose length is as the centuries, and whose patches of brilliant colour are as the splendours of empires; threads of different hues run through the length of the carpet, and with these same coloured threads of yesterday we weave the cross-threads of today; nor is it a mere figure of speech to term our carpet oriental, for though it has spread westward, it was woven in the east, and while each succeeding civilization has also added its threads lengthwise to the whole, the weaver whose threads have run longest is undoubtedly Moses.

Moses was probably the first man with a modern legal mind; he is certainly properly regarded as the father of our present system of legal morality, which is based upon the formulation of social commandments and the punishment of those who break them; nor are these commandments merely those which society employs to regulate the relations of one individual with another; they more and more tend to regulate the actions of the individual in relation to himself. And this is not local to the United States. A belief in the power of the law to cure the evils of modern society is characteristic of all political parties throughout the western world; and with the modern growth of what is technically known as democracy, this is rapidly increasing; for if horse-

racing was the sport of kings, law-making is certainly the sport of politicians.

Moses is not only the historical figure of the Bible, the man who delivered the children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt and led them to the Promised Land; he created a conception of God and of himself which almost every child associates with its own father; for in the bosom of their families, most fathers play the part of Moses and rule by commandments, while most children, like the children of Israel, must either obey or take the unpleasant consequences. This is one of the many reasons why the story of Moses has a universal interest, not merely because it is the story of the early thought-processes of modern civilization, but also because there is in it the counterpart of the experience of almost every child in relation to its own father. This has made the influence of the teachings of Moses in the western world far greater than that of any other religious figure, not even excepting Christ; for in order to convince the pagan world of the reality of Christ and the truth of his teachings, it was first necessary to deify him, and though he has been dead for nearly twenty centuries, the sermon which he preached upon the mount remains upon the mount, while humanity is still submerged in the valley. But Moses taught nothing with relation to God which a child is not in the habit of accepting with relation to its own father, so that while Christ's teachings have usually been outside the range of common human experience

(and we tacitly recognize them as such when we term them "idealistic"), yet the teachings of Moses are comprehensible to every father who gives orders to his child, and to every child who obeys them.

The Bible Story

It is claimed that the Books of Moses were not written by Moses; that they were probably written or rewritten after the Babylonian Captivity. The questions of how, why or when they were written are of little practical importance; what is important in relation to our civilization is that the Bible has been accepted by various branches of mankind for many hundreds of years, and the story of Moses is part of the folklore of all the western nations; it is also the unbroken traditional background of the Jew. We may therefore take the Bible at its face value, as coinage current in the realm; it has been accepted for centuries, and we are here mainly concerned with its effects upon those people who have long believed in it.

The impact of the Israelites upon the Egyptians, as told at the end of Genesis, was at first almost entirely economic. Joseph, a wandering shepherd lad, came into Egypt from the wilds to try his luck. His thought-processes were substantially different from those of the Egyptians with whom he sought employment. Accustomed to contemplate the abstraction of a God whose claim to godhead was made

manifest by the fact that his greatness was infinite and so could not be visualized, his capacity for abstract thinking was greater than that of the Egyptians, and when an opportunity was given him to bring his mind to bear upon the economic problems of Egypt, he easily outplayed the Egyptian statesmen at their own game; he not only showed Pharaoh how to circumvent the famines which periodically plunged Egypt into starvation, but he showed Pharaoh how to turn these famines to his own advantage; Joseph became the food dictator of Egypt, and installed storehouses, to which the people were ordered to bring food during times of plenty, which food the people were forced to repurchase in the famine time. As the result of this ingenious system, Pharaoh possessed himself of all the liquid assets of the country, and became the first capitalist-monopolist; when the people had no more money or goods with which to purchase food, Joseph placed the entire land under a system of tithes, so that Pharaoh enjoyed one-fifth of the earnings of all Egypt. Encouraged by the success of Joseph, his relatives and friends descended into Egypt, as might have been expected; for in the economic struggle the Israelite was more than a match for the Egyptian, who was hampered by religious views which were a positive handicap to material success.

Brought up in the imagery of a religion which had literally hundreds of gods, the Egyptian was unaccustomed to what we call abstract or objective

thought to anything like the same extent as the Israelite, for if the latter felt the presence of a single god in the hundred and one manifestations of nature, the Egyptian found a god in every manifestation which was otherwise inexplicable to him. All important natural objects, such as the sun, the moon and the river Nile, were gods; the night, the day, the year, the seasons, were gods; and even many abstract conceptions, such as knowledge, fate, truth and right, were visualized by the Egyptians in the mythical figures of minor gods. They were god-ridden, and their thought-processes were confused and archaic, for they could think in words only in relation to specific matters; all other thinking lay in the realm of phantasy and myth.

But there was another belief which placed the Egyptians at a disadvantage, economically speaking, as compared with the Israelites who had now become their neighbours. The Egyptians pictured a life beyond the grave on a grandiose scale, where the living-dead engaged in colourful exploits in the conflicts of the gods; while the Israelites, their noses to the ground, saw death dimly, but were realists as to life. The amazing energy with which the early Egyptian fastened his hopes upon the after-life is measured by the greatest monuments ever built by man. Almost sixty centuries have passed since the Pharaohs of the Fourth Dynasty raised the great Pyramids which bear witness to their dreams of immortality, yet not one of all the billions of men who

have lived and died after them has felt an urge to build a monument to surpass them. And although the Pyramids were works of antiquity to the Egyptian of Bible times, yet tomb-building was still one of the major industries of Egypt, a practice carried on by all who could afford it, and encouraged to the full by the numerous sects of priests who benefited by the practice.

Contrasted with the beliefs of the god-haunted Egyptians, the religion of the Israelites was simplicity itself. They worshipped only one god, with a faint suggestion of fallen and risen angels, which were probably borrowed concepts, or the relics of an earlier polytheism; for while the theory has been formulated that the worship of a single god resulted from the fusion of a number of small or local gods into a single great and universal god, as the small tribal chieftain gave place to the king or ruler of a number of tribes, it is also true that, having created a great god, men later tend to create minor gods (or saints) to intercede between the great god and themselves.

The Discovery of Jehovah

It seems more probable that, centuries before the coming of Joseph to Egypt, some anxious shepherd poet, guarding his sheep from beasts of prey at night, and lonely for an all-protecting father, had felt the single harmony of nature, and thus dis-

covered God. The skies roofed his temple, and its walls were the horizons; and no crude image wrought by clumsy shepherd hands could symbolize his greatness, since he was higher than the heavens and wider than the world. And so the Israelites, in the beginnings of their religion, may have worshipped God without images, without image-houses or temples, and without the elaborate observances which were inherent in the ceremonious worship of the numerous gods of Egypt, and were exploited to the utmost by an intelligent, powerful and exacting priesthood.

The discovery of Jehovah (or his evolution, whichever you prefer) was an amazing feat, both spiritually, economically and scientifically. For this conception of a single god was not only more sublimely grandiose than the conception of individual nature gods, such as Ra, the sun-god; it also produced excellent economic results, and laid the foundation for modern scientific thought. By worshipping the god who made the sun, the moon and the stars, one not only worshipped a far greater god than the sun-god, the moon-god, and the multitudinous gods of the firmament; it became unnecessary to give a great deal of time and thought to a great many gods; and by denying the existence of these other gods, a great deal of interest was lost in the life beyond death, for it stood to reason that if there was only one god, the after-life would not be nearly so complex as an after-life spent in the company of a multitude of gods. Indeed, so successful were the Israelites in diverting

attention from the goings-on in Heaven, to the great detriment of the priesthood of all time, that the Roman Catholic Church, centuries later, had to people Heaven and Hell with saints and devils, and to invent the special territory called Purgatory, in order to cause the living to take a more vivid interest in death.

But the belief in a single god not only made the Israelites think far less about death; it also made them think far more about life, and thus develop that method of directed logical thinking which explains the working of nature in terms of *reality* instead of in terms of *mythology;* for while the Egyptian explained the sun as the god who journeyed across the sky each day, and was quite satisfied with that explanation, the Israelite, on the contrary, regarded it as a gigantic lighting and heating machine without the slightest attribute of divinity. Once the myth is destroyed, the scientific explanation seeks to take its place. And while the Israelites were not the discoverers of abstract science in the modern sense of the word, they laid the foundations for its birth; for science was born when people ceased to answer every "how" or "why" of nature with a myth. In addition to freeing men from the confusing mythology of the earlier thinking, the Israelites postulated, in the unity of Jehovah, the first great scientific hypothesis; for there is no Jehovah myth in the sense of the myths of other gods; he was not an epic hero with a host of legendary exploits. He was

the one god who made the heavens and the earth and controlled all the forces of nature and man; and the amazing researches of modern science affirm the unity of the universe, the unity of its laws and the unity of its forces and substance; for we are learning that not only is each thing in the heavens and earth "made" of the same matter, but that this same matter is, in actual fact, a form of universal energy.

Unhampered by too vivid a conception of the afterlife, and possessed of their better method of thinking, the Israelites undoubtedly settled down in Egypt to make the best of this world, and to let the other world take care of itself. As the Bible quaintly expresses it, "*And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen, and they got them possessions therein, and were fruitful, and multiplied exceedingly.*" (Genesis, 47:27.)

Since Egypt had its Ethiopians, it also had its Ku Klux Klan, which, before long, began to persecute the Children of Israel on the ground that they could not be assimilated, and that if war came "*they would join themselves with our enemies.*" (Exodus, 1:10.) This fear of the Israelites becoming "hyphenated" Egyptians led the less commercial, but numerically stronger, Egyptians to persecute and rob the Israelites, and to force them into manual servitude, a course of proceeding which, with minor variations, has recommended itself to stupid persons throughout the ages; and none of whom have had sufficient sense to learn from repeated experience

that persecution, being a double-edged sword, has never succeeded against the Israelites, since it has taught them to partake of the quality of all two-edged swords, and to become doubly keen as a consequence. Thirty-five centuries have passed since the first recorded persecution of the Israelites, and only yesterday the gutters in Russian villages were running with their blood; yet civilization has still to learn the lesson that the Jew can be destroyed only by kindness.

The Advent of Moses

Since persecution in no way solved the Jewish problem in Egypt, the Pharaoh of the time (generally thought to be Ramses II, about B. C. 1300) decided upon what seemed to be the more obviously effective course of exterminating them; he issued an edict to that end, and this was presently destined to save Israel, since its cruelty aroused the pity of one of Pharaoh's daughters, who saved the life of Moses, the son of an Israelite slave, and brought him up in her palace, presumably in the best Egyptian manner. There is no more vivid story in history than that of this man of amazing genius, Moses, whose influence has remained substantially unbroken in one or other part of the world for over thirty centuries; his achievements cover many fields, for he was not only a man of thought, the author of the first unified system of law and a code of hygiene

which still largely holds good, but he was also a man of action, the revolutionary leader who delivered his people from slavery, and the warrior who conquered the Amorites and other Semitic tribes, and paved the way for Israel to become a nation upon its own soil. His life is still a living memory, undimmed by the ages; indeed, he emerges from the Bible narrative more vigorously alive, more definitely close to the conventional every-day thought of today, than many a figure of great prominence of the past few hundred years; Shakespeare, as a personality, is a ghostly flicker by comparison. Educated by the Princess (who may have been the daughter of a Syrian bride of Pharaoh, since she seems to have been more than ordinarily immune to the anti-semitic prejudices of the hundred-per-cent Egyptians of her day), we are told that Moses "*went out unto his brethren and looked on their burdens.*" Accused of killing an Egyptian taskmaster, he fled to the plains of Midian, where he was ordered by Jehovah to go back to Egypt and liberate his people; and so Moses returned and actually succeeded in frightening Pharaoh with the vengeance of Jehovah to such an extent that he not only let the children of Israel leave Egypt, but gave them gold and jewels to take with them into the bargain.

Moses then set out to lead his people back to the land from which Joseph and his brethren had migrated several centuries earlier, and which was now in the possession of other tribes which had set-

tled there, and had every reason to regard the country as their own; successful in the first part of his undertaking, his task of leading the Israelites through the wilderness was far more difficult, owing to the unruly character of his followers, who, though accustomed to the domination of the Egyptians, were quite unaccustomed to the domination of one of their own race. Moses was therefore never accepted by the Israelites as a king, though so to have proclaimed himself would have been the obvious course for a tribal leader to pursue; Israel, with its Council of Elders and its congregation, corresponded crudely to a democracy led by Moses, who was not so much an autocrat as an aristocrat; he was the man of cultivated Egyptian scholarship and a legal turn of mind, in the midst of an uneducated rabble of liberated serfs; and if we detect throughout the Old Testament a note of scorn in his reference to his followers as a "stiff-necked people," we may recognize some of the difficulties he encountered in maintaining his leadership by sheer power of intellect.

One God: One Law

It was during this period that Moses, the liberator of Israel, became Moses the law-maker; and it is this phase of his life which has most influenced the civilization which has followed in his wake. Confronted with the ever-present danger of attack by

nomadic tribes in the desert, and the need for unity of command, Moses set up the authority of Jehovah as Supreme Judge, and then proceeded to govern Israel by virtue of this authority, and to legislate to his heart's content; law, based upon a definite and logical conception of justice, for the first time in history, superseded the autocratic whims of monarchs and the conflicting laws of the priests of different gods, for while there had been many earlier social laws and taboos, there was this virtue in the Hebrew legal system which had not existed in any other, that it was the first to avoid the bugbear of all legal systems, the confusion arising from conflicting authority. The system of Moses was simplicity itself; God made the laws, and Moses administered them; it was only upon the persuasion of Jethro, his father-in-law, that Moses permitted other judges to interpret the laws; and it was to codify the laws for these judges that Moses undertook the task of writing them on Mount Sinai.

The legal system of Moses was centuries ahead of the times; but it was the legal system of a nomadic group of people, sometimes settled and sometimes wandering; it was justice, but rough justice; the justice of the desert, which demands an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life, since there was no regular police body to carry out the law and no portable prison for the criminals; for though Moses actually commanded the Israelites to love their neighbours as themselves (Leviticus, 19:

18), the western world did not learn that doctrine from Moses, but from Christ, since the story of Moses is also the story of law and punishment, while the story of Christ is the story of love and non-resistance. Nor is it possible that the doctrines of Christ, which have seldom been put into practice in Christian communities which have been settled for hundreds of years, could have been conceived or put into operation in the desert wanderings of the Israelites, to whom the practice of these doctrines at such a time would have seemed little short of race-suicide. The law of Moses is the law of the desert, the law of the marauder, the law of rough justice, of punishment by vengeance; and it is, in spirit, also the law of twentieth century civilization which, while giving lip-service to a higher ideal, has in actual reality progressed hardly at all in the direction of that ideal in the space of thirty centuries; for we still take a life for a life, and inflict years of imprisonment for an eye and often as much for a tooth; and if the punishment is sometimes different, the principle is always the same.

One God: No Images

Since the unity of Moses' legal system and the source of his authority with the Israelites rested solely upon the unity of Jehovah, Moses set his face against "graven images" at the outset of his wanderings, for to have permitted any of his followers to

practice the craft of sculpture was to acquiesce in the forging of weapons which might be used to overthrow his leadership. His authority and position was at all times threatened by any rebellious follower who could make an idol and set it up for worship at a moment when Providence (or Jehovah) had not favored the Israelites. Using his plain common sense, Moses took a thoroughly logical stand against images; not only against idols, but against all images, since the image of today might have become the idol of tomorrow. Moses was not at all concerned with æsthetics; images in a desert, for any purpose other than for idolatry, would have been a great nuisance. The possibility of an Israelite trudging along with a statue on his back, and periodically setting it down in the desert to admire its beauty, would have struck Moses, as it does ourselves, as thoroughly ridiculous; for if pearls are of little value in the wilderness, art is a positive liability. We may therefore be sure that Moses did not at all concern himself with any of the effects of his law against making graven images other than the immediate effect; to wit, the prevention of idolatry, which would have spelled disaster to his great project. Yet here, too, a law which was logical in the desert became the law of Israel for all time, so that to this day the orthodox Jew will make no images, and the realm of plastic art bears no imprint of his handiwork except in those few cases

where an individual Jewish sculptor has broken away from the traditional taboo.

The Many Gods of Art and the Single God of Science

The actual result of Moses' fear of idolatry was this; not only did the Israelites ultimately become completely divorced from graven images, but they also became almost completely divorced from thinking of images, though not without a long struggle which was marked by the numerous lapses into idolatry recorded in the Scriptures from the worship of the Golden Calf right down to the dispersion. The cult of Jehovah was utterly destructive to the cult of other god-myths which might otherwise have furnished inspiration to the Semitic artist; nor had Adam, Noah, Abraham or any other figure of Jewish mythology any of the glamour of divinity, so that when the Israelites worshipped idols from time to time, they did not deify the figures of their immediate racial myths, but borrowed from the mythology of other peoples.

Now there is this peculiarity about people who worship a number of gods and consequently have a rich mythology, as compared with people who have only one or two gods and a poor mythology, such as the Hebrews or the modern Protestants, that the people with many gods make many images, while the people with one or few gods make few images, and the creative faculty of man has been developed

to its highest point in the realm of art in peoples at times when they have believed in many gods, while the sciences and mental activities of men have reached their highest developments in peoples at times when they have believed in few gods. Thus we pass from a comparison of the ancient Egyptians and the Israelites, the former with their amazing artistic and architectural achievements in the service of the gods, the latter with their mental achievements in the realm of law and hygiene in the service of man; and as we glance down the ages, we notice that practically all the great periods of achievement in the plastic, graphic and architectural arts have been accompanied by the worship of gods with images, while the great periods of scientific, philosophic, ethical or legal development have been either accompanied by a lack of faith in a number of gods, or by a positive belief in a single god. So that we owe to the polytheistic Greeks and image-making Christians of the Renaissance, as well as to the image-making Chinese and Indians, the greatest periods of plastic and related arts in history; alike in the realm of sculpture portraying the gods or saints; in graphic art such as the religious masterpieces of the Renaissance; in applied art such as the Greek and Chinese pottery; and in the architecture which developed in the building of religious structures and reached its highest forms in the harmony of the Greek temples, and in the majestic Byzantine and Gothic churches and cathedrals of Europe. And

no people in a monotheistic phase have produced a plastic or graphic art at all comparable to that produced by polytheistic peoples, any more than polytheistic peoples have made progress in the sciences and philosophy at all comparable with the progress of monotheistic peoples; nor is it a mere accident that in most cases where polytheistic peoples have progressed in science, that this progress has been made at the time when at least some of the people were beginning to doubt the existence of the gods, or were destroying their racial myths in other ways; and it was the men who had freed themselves to a considerable extent from the thought-confusing racial myths and were thus able to perceive the reality of the natural phenomena around them, who laid the foundations of modern science and philosophy, to which the Israelites contributed, in part, ethics, hygiene, medicine, law, finance and economics. The Greek philosophers, such as Socrates and Plato, made their contribution to science at a time when the polytheistic art of Greece reached its zenith, yet they were also contemporaries of Anaxagoras (said to be the teacher of Socrates), who had incurred the displeasure of the mob of Athens by preaching the heretical belief in a universal god; and the Alexandrian school of scientific philosophers, which included such men as Euclid, Appolonius and Archimedes, was not only in contact with the monotheism of the Alexandrian Jews, but carried on its work at the time when the process of unifying the

gods known as the *theocrasia* was in full swing; so that both these schools of philosophers can be regarded as the products of times when there were monotheistic or even atheistic beliefs and an image-making religion existing side by side, as in modern France, which produces many fine scientists, few of whom are to be found worshipping at the shrines of the saints. Again, the early Phœnicians, a branch of the Semitic race, who were either monotheistic or made few or no images, contributed the science of navigation, the business of commerce and the art of writing; and the Mahomedans discovered the sciences of algebra and chemistry and were learned in astronomy, medicine and other sciences at a time when contemporary Europe was still submerged in the Dark Ages, the period when the Church was forming its legends of the saints which were later to flower into the Art of the Renaissance. (While the Mahomedans are also famous for their architecture and pattern design, these are peculiarly geometrical in character and distinctly the product of a monotheistic people emerging from an earlier polytheism. The justly famous Persian art, which has so influenced modern Russian art, was produced by the Mahomedans who followed the teachings of the prophet Ali, and were permitted graphic artistic expression.) The Chinese, with Buddhism existing both as a philosophic religion, and also as an image-worshipping religion, have made many scientific discoveries notably in astrology and manufactures.

Finally, the greatest period of scientific development was made possible by the advent of Luther, who, in destroying the images with which the Catholic Church had bedecked the faith of Christ, liberated the peoples of the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon races from the encumbering mythology of the Middle Ages, and as a consequence almost entirely eliminated the association of images from the early religious training of the youth of England, Germany and (later) the United States.

Luther did for the Protestants what Moses did for the Israelites; and the results in both cases have this much in common; that both Protestants and Hebrews produce little or nothing original in the field of plastic or graphic art or architecture, but are eminently successful in the fields of science, finance, trade, medicine, literature and (to some extent) music; and while many important modern scientific discoveries have originated in Catholic countries, these have been almost invariably made by men who have been opposed to the Church; for the priests of the polytheistic religions have been perfectly correct in assuming that science is their enemy. Galileo is dead, but not forgotten, either by the Church or by Science.

Moses and Catholicism

Although it was the Protestant Church which spread the Mosaic type of civilization over England,

Germany and the United States, yet Catholicism has undoubtedly played an important part in the process, and in considering Catholicism, we must also consider the relationship of Christ himself to this type of civilization. This is not the place to inquire into the many controversies which have raged over the divine origin of Christ. His failure is all too human. He laid down his life in protest against the results of the legal and moralistic Mosaic civilization in which he lived, only to give that civilization a new lease upon life, and to spread it all over the western world; for there is no doubt about the fact that the success of Judaism as a proselytizing religion was limited by the racial pride of the Hebrews, who regarded themselves as the chosen people, and were not particularly keen on sharing the privileges of the seed of Abraham with other less-favored races; and though the Israelites converted a few of the image-worshipping pagans who mingled among them, to the abstract conception of a monotheistic deity, they succeeded to about the same extent as the modern Protestant churches have made converts in China; that is to say, to a very small extent indeed. The fact that Moses had prohibited the Israelites from making graven images not only precluded the Jews from taking the gods of other people; it also precluded other people from dropping their own gods and taking the God of the Jews. It was not until Christ had lived and died, that the pagan world was able to gain a real conception of

Jehovah, for in the very act of dying, Christ had created an image which was undying; the image of a young man crucified upon a cross. The pagan mind could worship this image, and quickly bridged the gap between God the Son, portrayed on the crucifix, and God the Father, the God of the Hebrews, of whom no image could be made at all, and being unseen, had also been unfelt.

Notwithstanding its proselytizing advantages as compared with Judaism, early Christianity was handicapped in comparison with the religions of Egypt, Greece and Rome, with their elaborate array of deities; and it was not long before the Church began to realize the value of images, with the consequent appearance of a crop of saints, which, while they were in themselves clearly distinguishable from the pagan gods, yet in practice were accepted as orthodox and thoroughly satisfactory substitutes by the erstwhile pagan masses of believers. As a result, the Christianity of the Church, with its rich mythology, its imposing ceremonies, its majestic churches in which were housed the images of its multitude of saints, spread in a blaze of triumph across the pagan world, for it did in Rome as Rome did, and as Rome had done long before; and it was as ready to adopt Father Christmas as it was the Easter Egg or the Easter Rabbit, or any other pagan symbol or practice which suited its purpose, with the result that Catholicism has written some of the most brilliant pages in the book of human culture (as well

as some of the worst), but not in the realm of abstract thought or science. And so for over fifteen hundred years Moses was buried in the Bible, and Catholicism managed very well with its graven images; nevertheless, the Church, while it was quite willing to intercede for the forgiveness of sins in the hereafter, did not go to any great lengths to interfere with the punishment of sinners in the present, and although Moses, himself, was almost forgotten, the Church never failed to remember the formula, "Thou shalt not" when the occasion called for it.

Moses and Protestantism

The reaction to the worldly pomp and power of the Catholic Church, which resulted in Protestantism, not only liberated its adherents from the mythology of Catholicism and cleared the way for straight scientific thinking in the field of realities; it also resulted in the introduction to the western world of Moses, who had been slumbering in the obscurity to which the world of Catholicism had relegated him; for Moses had been given very little consideration by the Catholic Church; he was not a Christian, and was, therefore, not even entitled to the prominence given to a minor Saint. But the translation of the Bible from Latin into the language of the people, and its more general reading by the educated laymen, not only brought the teachings of Moses prominently to the fore, but actually made him a figure

second only to Christ; for when Catholicism dropped the application of Christ's teachings of non-resistance and the brotherhood of man, and when Protestantism dropped the saints, the residue was so nearly akin to the moral code of Moses that you can tell them apart only by differences in superficial observances and beliefs, rather than in ethical concepts. And it was the ideas of Moses, and not those of Christ, which were identified with the growth of the three modern movements which we term Nationalism, Democracy and Political Freedom, which were an accompaniment to Protestantism.

Moses and Nationalism

Moses is definitely identified with the Nationalism which followed in the wake of the waning influence of the Catholic Church, which had hitherto held Europe spiritually united in the single realm of Christendom, for Moses was a Nationalist of the first order; he preached that the climatically unfavorable land of Canaan was a land "flowing with milk and honey" and that the Hebrews were "God's chosen people"; and he did this just as avidly as the American of today carelessly refers to his native land as "God's Own Country": And while an acquired modesty may sometimes restrain the inhabitants of the United States from giving expression to the deep belief that Americans (of Nordic race) are the salt of the earth, we are quite ready to challenge the

validity of any other peoples' claim to that position in priority to our own. In other words, Moses displayed that same absurd pride in the alleged excellence of his own race, his own language, and his own land, above all others, that we exhibit everywhere in the world today under the label of patriotism; and as a result of which when two or more nations, each with a sufficiently developed spirit of nationalism, have a difference of opinion, it cannot be settled in the manner which intelligent people customarily employ to compose their differences, but produces an emotional outburst of national pride which completely prevents rational thinking, so that the dispute usually culminates in the barbaric spectacle of a war which seldom settles the question, but merely proves that one country happens to be stronger than the other for the time being. Moses, however, was not the father of European nationalism; it began before he became a widely-known figure, yet the nationalism which he had imparted to the Jews thirty centuries earlier kept them a race apart and the leading exponents of racial nationality during the period when the Church held spiritual dominion over the greater part of Europe, and men were not loyal to a country or to a nation, but to their feudal lords.

Moses and Democracy

In the struggles of the common people for legislative power during the past three hundred years,

Moses dominated all literature prior to the American Revolution as the liberator of his people; for if Washington deserved the reputation of being the Father of his Country, Moses had earned a similar title centuries before. But more than that; he did not merely liberate men from tyranny and taxes; he liberated serfs from bondage, a fact which has also associated him with the aspirations of the common people of England and the United States in their struggles for economic emancipation.

The Anglo-Saxon adaptation of Hebrew ethics known as Puritanism was a direct outcome of the rediscovery of the Old Testament by the English people; indeed, so greatly did the Roundheads admire the prohibitions of Moses, as well as his essential democracy, that they actually identified themselves with the Scriptural characters by taking Biblical names, and then proceeded to establish a British Republic along Mosaic lines in the dictatorship of Cromwell, an event which has never been paralleled in English history. But before the Pharaoh of England was overthrown, a little band of Puritans set forth like the Children of Israel in search of another Promised Land; they called themselves the Pilgrim Fathers, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and brought their Old Testaments with them. If any one doubts the tremendous influence of the Old Testament on the hard-headed New England Fathers, he has only to consult any elementary text-book on the subject, for the Elders of Israel and the Elders

of New England differed but slightly in their ethical concepts, and our Puritan congregations were quite as assiduous in the burning of witches as were the Hebrew congregations in the stoning of women taken in adultery. And the concepts of the invisible voyager who journeyed to America with the *Mayflower*, were later to influence the thought of the New World in still a different direction, to wit: in the form of its much-vaunted concept of liberty. The Fathers of our Country were fully aware of what they owed in this respect to the Father of the Law; indeed, a committee consisting of Benjamin Franklin, John Quincy Adams and Thomas Jefferson proposed that the first official seal of the United States should picture Moses overthrowing the Egyptians, accompanied by the legend *Rebellion To Tyrants Is Obedience To God*, and such a seal was actually prepared by the French artist Simitiere, though it was never officially adopted; while our national heirloom, the famous Liberty Bell, which rang out the news of the signing of the Declaration of Independence (and is now somewhat symbolically cracked), bears as its inscription what were believed to be the actual words written by Moses: "*Proclaim Liberty Throughout All The Land Unto All The Inhabitants Thereof*" (Leviticus, 25:10). There is very little difference between American liberty and Biblical liberty: We are no longer the subjects of a Pharaoh or a King George, yet we are indifferent alike to the tyrannies of a Moses or of a cowardly

Congress which sells its honor for votes to bullying minorities of fanatics who impose their prohibitions upon the rest of us.

Moses and Political Liberty

Coincident with the Puritan movement came the beginnings of our so-called Political Liberty, which is not liberty at all, but merely a misleading label applied to our principle of government which permits people other than kings to exercise the right to make laws, which people, as often as not, are gangs of organized corruptionists as bad if not worse than the worst of kings. As a result, any politically-minded individual with a talent for oratory, a taste for power and the ability to popularize himself with the electorate (or to hoodwink it successfully), found that he could elevate himself to the position of a Moses, and following the example of the Father of the Law, proceed to legislate on any and all of the problems of humanity.

But what was even more amazing, such men succeeded in making the people who elected them believe that the solution of these problems could be achieved by the law, and most of them have continued to enjoy the confidence of the electorate right up to the present time, in the face of the fact that most legislation has been conspicuously unsuccessful in solving any of the real problems of men, since these lie deep in the soul where the law cannot reach

them. The formula of Moses has run riot in the United States; according to reliable statistics, an average of nearly ten thousand Federal and State laws are enacted each year by thousands of paid legislators, and it is estimated that there are actually over two hundred thousand Federal and State laws now in force throughout the country. So childlike is our belief in the efficacy of the law in the United States (notwithstanding the fact that nowhere in the world is the law so disregarded), that I have actually seen and heard an audience of over a thousand people become almost hysterical over a motion picture in which Moses was depicted on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments, one by one, each to the accompaniment of a shower of stars, a repercussion of thunder, and a convulsion of the firmament, all cleverly managed by trick photography and a sheet of tin, which could not deceive the silliest spectator; yet as each Commandment was thrown upon the screen, it was greeted with tumultuous applause and wild cheers. Indeed, so deeply is Moses enshrined in the American heart, that one wonders whether there is any room left for Christ. For in the conflict between love for one's neighbour, and law for one's neighbour, the faction supporting the latter proposition has entirely the upper hand, while the great constructive principles of Christianity have been almost completely lost to view. If, for every fifty laws our Congress passes to regulate the quarrels of men, as much as one concerted effort were

to be made to bring the many elements of our population together in the harmony of their common humanity, the great stream of legislation might ultimately be reduced to a trickle.

And following in the wake of Nationalism, Democracy and Political Liberty, we have our modern industrial civilization with its factory system; a civilization which finds its richest soil in Protestant England, Protestant Germany, and Protestant United States, and meets its greatest resistance in the Catholic countries of Europe and portions of Canada (compare Catholic Quebec with Protestant Toronto).

A few years ago, the Japanese, hampered in the industrial field by too pagan a religion, adopted the Mosaic Sabbath or weekly day of rest. Pagan festivals extending over a number of days do not harmonize with industrialism.

The Golden Age of Science

Just as the Golden Age of Art followed the worship of the many gods of Greece, so the Golden Age of Science has followed the worship of God without the images which Moses prohibited to the Israelites, and which Luther removed from Catholicism. Men have never known quite so much as they know now; could never travel so fast; produce so much; organize so efficiently; build so well; conquer disease

or prolong life so effectively. Science has had its triumphs; but it also has its defeats.

And chief among these is its failure to realize the need of men for beauty; not merely beauty in the sense of art, but also in the sense of crafts; for it is the irony of modern industrial civilization that in order that more people may live in the world, modern machine production has taken away one of the main incentives for life by sentencing large numbers of men to the service of the mechanisms they operate with dull monotonous regularity. For men do not live by bread alone, and when they are no longer interested in life, their bodies live on but their souls die. And while there have always been men who played the part of machines throughout the ages, yet at no time has their proportion been so large and the craftsmen so relatively few; and if we recognize that the desire to create, whether it be in the field of the arts, crafts (including skilled workmanship), science, invention or enterprises, is inherent in the greater part of mankind, it is apparent that modern civilization leaves the doors wide open for creation in science, invention and enterprise, but shuts it almost completely for the arts and crafts.

The result is materialism at its worst. Men still build for the gods, but they more often build for six per cent on the investment; and since most men do not create in beauty or craftsmanship, they create in possessions; they attempt every possible and impossible method of compensating themselves outside

of their occupation for the unhappiness they experience within their occupation; yet those who do not find happiness in their work find no lasting happiness outside it. The hope for humanity lies in the fact that in the midst of our mad race for the accumulation of property, wealth and goods, we still search unceasingly for higher values, a search of which the discontent of our times is an undoubted symptom.

I do not speak only of the discontent of the working classes, which have suffered most at the hands of the inventors and the engineers from the application of scientific principles in manufacture; I include the rich man who is often just as discontented with four automobiles, eight homes and sixteen marble bathrooms (which Tolstoi said were contrary to God), as the machine tender is discontented with his routine job, his Ford and his humble dwelling. And if the machine tender pays any attention to the wholesale dissemination of organized temptation which is known as modern advertising, and is foolish enough to believe (as he undoubtedly will do), that if he changes his Ford for a limousine, and his modest home for a villa in the best residential district, he will thereby achieve contentment, he will be ultimately just as mistaken and as disillusioned as the discontented rich man (who, by way of complicating the situation, creates additional discontent by tempting poorer men with advertisements at every street corner to purchase more goods on the one

hand, while reducing or refusing to increase the wages paid to these poorer men on the other hand). Nor can the labor unions secure happiness for their members, when the measure of their success is not shorter hours and self-expression in and out of work, but a Ford and a picture palace, in place of artisanship, athletics, the public library, and the art gallery.

The Protest of Our Age

If the modern industrial system promises us no more than the further multiplication of goods, and the scramble for their ownership, with the further dehumanization of labor in their manufacture; the further enactment of laws curtailing personal liberty and stamping out individuality and self-expression in men, so that they may fit more readily into a machine-made social structure which is alleged to be efficient economically, but is ruinous alike to the body and soul; the further spread of cold, lifeless, puritanical religions which, when they flicker into the semblance of flame, merely help in the processes of wrecking the imagination of youth; and the organization of whole nations into armies of citizen soldiers fused into an obedient machine-like mass by the hocus-pocus of a manufactured patriotism, and equipped with every ingenious instrument and chemical which malevolent science can place at its command, to burn, maim, torture, cripple and kill other

human beings; if modern civilization can offer us nothing better than *more* of what it has already given us as much as we can pleasantly stomach, then our civilization must ultimately degrade most of us to the level of the machines themselves, or destroy us utterly.

But above the shouts of the market places, the rattle of machinery, the babel of the legislatures, and the thunder of the battlefields, can be heard the voices of men and women raised in protest, voices which cannot be silenced, voices which will ultimately prevail; for they are the voices of those who have ultimately prevailed against every obstacle man has had to face in the age-long struggle which has marked his progress from the palæozoic slimes towards his high destiny; and they will prevail again and again and again, until that high destiny is reached.

A New Progress

It is the fact that in the past the progress of humanity has never been directed by men themselves; individuals here and there have controlled the stream of human impulse for short periods, but in general the march of civilization has resembled nothing more dignified than the progress of a drunken man, lurching sometimes forward, sometimes backward. We have lurched too far in the direction in which the impulse of science has pushed us. We fell down badly

in the late war; it showed us that we must pull ourselves together again, sober up, and think out a new course, one that will be better directed than the present. We have stripped the past of the mythology which came between men and reality, and prevented them from directing their own progress; we have done this with the science which is now destroying the future; but we can rebuild the future by governing our own progress with the aid of science in the direction which will give the highest expression to all the faculties of men.

And there is no reason why we should not remember all we have learned in the past; we do not have to follow Chesterton back to the Middle Ages. It is not necessary to destroy the altar of science in order to worship at the shrine of art. It is demonstrable that if industrialism were harnessed to beauty, instead of to greed, the result would be a civilization just as efficient economically, and a great deal happier spiritually; for machinery bears men a great gift, which is leisure, and which can afford the greatest happiness if it is employed in the avocational exercise of the creative faculties where the vocation itself does not provide men with creative occupation. Nor does this involve Socialism, Communism or any other form of government; for so long as men's desires are measured in possessions, every form of government must fail. It is merely necessary to make a change in the direction of human ideals; one of the easiest things in the world to do,

if you can catch your humans young enough (as the Catholic priests know very well).

Our ideals are formed in early youth, in unconscious imitation of the father and mother, the teacher and the preacher; get at that formative period, either through the parent, the school or the church, and you can modify the ideals and behavior of humanity to an amazing extent. How many men would have died a thousand years ago "To Make the World Safe for Democracy," as the Wilsonian slogan has it? And how many Christians will die today, to retake Jerusalem from the Jews, to whom the British have loaned it? Ask the ghost of a Crusader whether human ideals change.

Once the fact is clearly recognized that modern materialism can never be combated merely by preaching or legislating against it, but that some different direction must be given to the stream of creative mass-imagination, educators, preachers and leaders of thought may come to realize that the most effective answer to materialism is art; and that the hope for our civilization lies in paying at least as much attention to artistic creation as to the creation of inventions and enterprises. It is time to use our machinery as the Greeks used slavery, as a basis for mass-leisure devoted to forms of art expressive of the soul of our period. The Puritan mind of America, reading these lines, would no doubt think immediately that some sort of new law will be necessary; a law to make people artists or craftsmen in

their spare time. Let it drop such an idea as if it were a poisonous snake. Mass-character cannot be formed in one direction and then kicked, pushed and bullied into another by means of any kind of legal coercion. Mass-character must be as fully and consciously formed on the image-creating side as it has been on the side of directed thought and science. This work is for the educators, preachers and leaders to do; and they can readily find the means to accomplish it when the simple principle is understood that our children must be given the greatest possible amount of image-association in early childhood, and preferably in relation to religion, so that artistic imagery will be developed in the mind, and the function of the creative imagination will find as full a range in the realm of art as it does in the field of directed thought and science. But more than this, the study and development of the creative faculties of children holds the greatest promise for the future of civilization; most schools devote scarcely any time at all to this subject, yet every great step forward in the progress of humanity has been made by the power of ideas resulting from the exercise of the creative faculties. A handful of modern educators have come to recognize this fact, but the great mass of teachers and academicians are either too blind or too stupid to depart from our traditional educational system, which appears to have for its main object to make each child as much as possible like every other child; indeed, the spirit

of popular education in America goes even further than our spirit of democracy, for while democracy affirms that all men are merely *born* equal, our educational system tries to *make* them all equal, and all of equal mediocrity.

A New Faith

To help us in changing our values, it may be necessary to establish a twentieth-century polytheism, for which a prophet is sorely needed, since we may not go back to the gods of Greece, and the saints of Rome, and take with us the science upon which we shall build our temple for the new gods. Indeed, the seeds of this religion are already sown. More and more men are coming to worship the gods which are in men themselves; more and more we tend to create a rational mythology in relation to the great men who have led humanity upward out of the slough of barbarism. We know better than to worship the men themselves as gods, and because we recognize in them our common divinity, as well as our common clay, we come to seek the gods within ourselves. These are the new gods; we are learning to know them, and like Shapan in this play, we shall soon "make images of them all".

The work of revealing the gods in men themselves has already begun in some of the Churches. Little by little the trappings of divinity are being removed from Christ, and a human figure emerges whose

teachings are being rediscovered and interpreted to our generation; it yet remains to associate them with beauty rather than with practicality; for we have had enough of the practical in religion, as well as of the ethical. It has brought the entire church movement to a morass of sterility into which so-called Community Churches, Young Men's Christian Associations, Christian Science and New Thought movements merely plunge it deeper; and where, for a moment, some church or other flares up as with the flame of life, we find it is the reflection of the living personality of some brilliant preacher who makes an idol of himself, and is worshipped as such by his congregation; but on his passing, his church is no longer the House of God, but a bleak temple despoiled of its image.

There is enough new-old truth in the unapplied teachings of Christ to give a vigorous impetus to a new religious movement which is fully conscious of mass thought-processes, and the need of humanity for beauty; from these sources a new stream of religious energy may well rise up, and flowing over the arid plains of our civilization, bring with it soil and seed for a higher and worthier culture.

But the hope of the future does not lie only in that emotional impulse towards understanding which we call religion; a religious attitude towards education (which, in the largest sense, embraces all religion), and the conscious desire to develop mass-imagination in the direction of art as well as science,

may produce the results desired. And whatever means our educators or preachers may adopt to direct the stream of mass-imagination into creative artistic channels, there is no doubt that the mass-character thus formed will, of its own nature, find ways to release itself from the domination of Moses, Materialism and the Machine.

CHARACTERS

Moses

Jochebed ..... His Mother

Miriam ..... His Sister

Princess Bint-Anath ..... Daughter of Pharaoh

Neb-Ket ..... A Priest of Ammon

Tenates ..... Nurse to Princess Bint-Anath

Thotmes ..... Assistant to Moses

Envoy ..... To Ahmes

Ahmes ..... An Egyptian nobleman

Ethiopian Slave

Aaron ..... Brother to Moses

Abinadab
Zuar
Eliazar
Helon ..... Israelites

Egyptian Official

Brith ..... A Half-wit

Captain of the Guard

The Great Voice

Herald ..... To Pharaoh

Ramses II .....Pharaoh of Egypt
Nefreti .....His Wife
High Priest of Ammon
Caleb .....Scribe to Moses
Shaphan .....A Sculptor
Jethro .....Father-in-law to Moses

Shaphat
Joshua
Ammeil
Nahsi } .....Israelites

Young Scribe

Maidens, Israelites, Egyptians, Soldiers, Courtiers, Slaves, Musicians, Trumpeters, Ladies-in-Waiting, Scribes, Servants, Elders, etc.

SCENES

PROLOGUE: A Bathing Pool at Per-Ramses, about 1400 B. C.

SCENE I: The Palace of Princess Bint-Anath, 24 years later.

First Interlude: A Street in Per-Ramses.

SCENE II: A Market Place in Per-Ramses, 2 years later.

Second Interlude: A Plain in Midian, 15 years later.

SCENE III: A Public Place in Per-Ramses, 1 year later.

SCENE IV: Outside Moses' Tent, before Mt. Sinai, 2 years later.

Third Interlude: Mt. Sinai.

SCENE V: Same as Scene IV, 41 days later.

SCENE VI: On the hills overlooking Canaan, 5 years later.

Fourth Interlude: The desert, some years later.

SCENE VII: Same as Scene VI, many years later.

MOSES

MOSES

PROLOGUE

A Bathing Pool at Per Ramses, Residential City of Ramses II in the Eastern delta of the Nile. Running entirely across the background is a platform of stone which serves as an embankment for the pool, but obscures our view of the water. In the centre of the embankment is a small shrine to the god Ammon-Ra. A few stone steps lead up to the shrine, whence one can walk along the embankment at either side until one's passage is barred at both ends by clumps of flags and rushes. A low parapet of stone runs along the outer edge of the platform. In the background, silhouetted against the cloudless blue sky, can be seen a temple which stands upon a sand-hill forming the opposite bank of the pool.

JOCHEBED, *preceded by her daughter* MIRIAM, *a child of about seven, comes to the pool.* JOCHEBED *carries an oval-shaped basket containing the infant* MOSES.

JOCHEBED

Go into the rushes, Miriam, and I will give you the

basket. [MIRIAM *goes into the clumps of rushes at the right hand side, and* JOCHEBED *hands her the basket, which* MIRIAM *conceals among the rushes.*]

MIRIAM

Can you see it from there?

JOCHEBED

Cover it a little more at the side.

MIRIAM

There. Help me, mother. [MIRIAM *extends her hand to her mother, who pulls her out of the rushes.*]

JOCHEBED

And now wait here, Miriam, and tell me what passes.

MIRIAM

Very well, mother. [*Looking towards the rushes.*] Poor little brother, what a shame to leave him here, with not even a little drop of milk to drink.

JOCHEBED

[*Kneels and weeps.*] Jehovah, grant that his cries may be heard by Pharaoh's daughter. Soften her heart, that she may pity him and spare his life.

MIRIAM

Hush, mother. People are coming.

JOCHEBED

[*Warningly, as she goes.*] Remember! [*She goes off.* BINT-ANATH, *daughter of* PHARAOH, *a Princess of Egypt, followed by* NEB-KET, *Priest of the god Ammon,* TENATES, *an old nurse, and her maidens, including* MYRA, TENA *and* SEMAR, *come towards the pool.* BINT-ANATH *is half Egyptian, half Syrian. She is a young and vivid girl, quick in her movements and imperious in her gestures.* TENATES *is a woman of seventy, somewhat palsied, but mentally active.* NEB-KET *is a dandified and rather effeminate priest of about thirty-five.*]

MYRA

[*Looking into pool.*] The water is as blue as lapis!

NEB-KET

[*Enthusiastically.*] Stay there, Myra! What a charming picture! It reminds me of that line of the poet Uni, "O Lotus Flower, beside the Lily Pond." [*Vaguely.*] How does it go?

PRINCESS

[*Dryly.*] Shame, Neb-Ket. It is not a poem a priest should quote. [MIRIAM *stands eyeing the party shyly.*]

TENATES

[*Angrily to* MIRIAM.] Begone, Israelite!

PRINCESS

Tenates! Why so ill-natured?

TENATES

Princess, have you forgotten your dignity?

PRINCESS

[*Removing a cloak, and revealing her thinly-clad body.*] Yes, Nanny. It's too warm for dignity.

TENATES

[*To* MIRIAM.] Run away, you brat! [TENATES *moves threateningly toward* MIRIAM, *who puts her tongue out at her. The* PRINCESS *and the Maidens laugh, as* TENATES *tries to catch* MIRIAM, *who easily eludes her and runs off.*]

TENATES

[*Puffing.*] Would I could run ten times faster. Were I your father, Princess, I should order the midwives of Egypt to kill the daughters of Israel, as well as the sons.

PRINCESS

You are so bad-tempered this morning, Nanny, I declare you would like to discharge the midwives, and kill them all yourself. [*To the Maidens.*] Who will race with me? The first into the water shall have this jewel my grandfather Khet sent me from

Syria. [*She shows them a small jewel which hangs around her neck. The girls, delighted, begin to remove their clothes.*]

NEB-KET

Princess, I forbid this race!

PRINCESS

Shut your eyes and turn your head the other way!

NEB-KET

Have you forgotten the ceremonies?

PRINCESS

[*Impatiently.*] Plague take you and your ceremonies!

NEB-KET

What saith the Ritual of Ammon?

PRINCESS

A lot of silly rigmarole.

NEB-KET

[*Sonorously.*] "Whosoever entereth the realm of the water without the customary rites, he shall surely perish by the water!"

PRINCESS

Listen to him! Come along, girls, let us go.

NEB-KET

Would you commit a sacrilege?

PRINCESS

[*Mounting the embankment and pointing to the right.*] Behold, O learned and suddenly-religious priest of Ammon! Yonder is that child of Israel! She has run into the pool without clothes or ceremony. Are the gods fonder of her than of me? Answer me!

NEB-KET

Princess, I cannot answer you. A wise priest never argues about religion. Let us proceed with the blessing of the waters.

PRINCESS

Very well. Proceed.

NEB-KET

Let us prostrate ourselves before Ammon-Ra, Father of the Gods and Celestial Parent of the Pharaohs! [NEB-KET *falls on the ground before the shrine, and the others follow his example.*]

PRINCESS

[*As she prostrates herself.*] It's such nonsense. [NEB-KET *mutters a perfunctory and quite unintelligible formula; one recognises from his humdrum in-*

tonation an old prayer that has long lost its original meaning. The PRINCESS *turns to* TENA.] What pretty golden pomegranates embroidered in your gown!

TENA

Do you like them?

NEB-KET

Silence! Bow now to the gods Osiris and Isis!

PRINCESS

[*Impatiently.*] Will we *ever* bathe today? [*The girls, who have returned from the shrine and are standing in line, all prostrate themselves as before. The Priest mumbles again. They all rise. The* PRINCESS *makes towards the water.*] At last!

NEB-KET

You forget. This is the day of the full-moon. Prostrate yourselves to Thoth.

PRINCESS

[*Ironic, angry.*] Yes, and after that to Horus, I suppose, and Set, and Nepthys, and Tefhet and Keb, and then to the Syrian gods, Baal, and Kadesh, and Astarte and Anath! Faugh! I'm sick and tired of all these gods!

TENATES and NEB-KET

[*Aghast.*] What!

PRINCESS

[*Stamping her pretty foot.*] I *am!* I wish I were an Israelite. I want to bathe!

NEB-KET

Do the Israelites bathe more often than the Egyptians?

PRINCESS

No, but see how simple it is for them to get into the water! They have but one god to our two hundred.

TENATES

Shame on you, Princess, to talk about such things!

PRINCESS

We are all *thinking* about them, so why not be honest and talk about them, Nanny?

TENATES

[*Grumbling.*] Well, if you are going to talk, I shall sit down. [*To the girls.*] Put your clothes on. There will be no bathing today. Your mistress is going to talk. [*She sits at the top of the stone steps.*]

PRINCESS

[*To the girls.*] Just wait a moment. I have

something I want to say to Neb-Ket. [*To* Neb-Ket.] If you want my opinion, Neb-Ket, I think that we Egyptians are simply obsessed with gods. Look at the way the people live. Most of them are so busy building their tombs, they have no time for anything else. And when they are not building their tombs, they're talking about their tombs. "Will you wear all your jewels in your sarcophagus, or will you give some of them away?" The most fashionable place for a drive in the afternoon is the burial ground. Is it any wonder that Egypt is a dull place to live in? [*The girls, one by one, sit on the stone steps, ranging themselves round the* Princess *and listening to her with interest.*]

Neb-Ket

[*Facetiously.*] It may be dull, Princess, but is it not pleasant? Why not have charming tombs? We shall occupy them far longer than our homes.

Princess

Don't be silly. I'm serious!

Neb-Ket

Can you suggest anything better? Would you have us devote our lives to trade and commerce, like the Israelites or the Phœnicians? No, Princess, we are above that sort of thing. [*Proudly.*] We Egyptians are a nation of artists! And it is our

religion that has made us so. Our delightful services, our magnificent temples, our sacred pools and fountains——

PRINCESS

[*Interrupting.*] Our fear of death, our terror of the night! Is that charming, too?

NEB-KET

What saith the Ritual of Ammon? "Desert not thy gods, but walk in the footsteps of thy fathers."

PRINCESS

Stop talking like a priest, Neb-Ket. You can be quite intelligent when you are not quoting the Ritual of Ammon. It's all very well to rhapsodize about our ancient religion to those who believe in it, but it's all rather dead today, while these Israelites are very much alive and can succeed at everything.

NEB-KET

They have succeeded so far only in the things in which we, as artists, and, need I add, as gentlemen, would scorn success. No, Princess, your father was wiser than you are. He fully realised the danger in which Egypt was placed when the Israelites remained here after the Hyksos were driven out

PRINCESS

Danger? What danger?

NEB-KET

He foresaw, quite rightly, that a people who worshipped only one god would have far more time for barter and commerce than a people who worshipped over two hundred, and that the wealth of the country would rapidly pass into their hands. Unfortunately, your mother—she was young then—was sentimental, and prevented him from slaughtering the entire tribe, but even *she* was forced to admit at last that your father was right.

PRINCESS

Mother? Admit that father was right? How remarkable!

NEB-KET

About that time, the High Priest of Thebes issued an edict commanding the freeman to say special prayers to the god Ammon, in addition to the usual *five* hours' devotion to their ordinary religious duties. While this was going on, the Israelites were spending only *two* hours a day in prayer, and gave the rest of their time to commerce, so that they waxed richer and richer, until at last they were numbered amongst the wealthiest in the land.

PRINCESS

But how clever of them. Why did we not all become Israelites?

NEB-KET

That is exactly what began to happen. Some of the foremost men of Egypt, following their example, became more eager to accumulate wealth than to devote themselves to our ancient culture. They began to talk of reducing the number of Egyptian gods. Some went so far as to pray only *one* hour a day to Ammon, and became even richer than the Israelites. The Priests saw that, if this continued, the Egyptians would soon be reduced to the level of a nation of shopkeepers, and——

PRINCESS

[*Mischievously.*] Thousands of priests would have nothing to do!

NEB-KET

[*Ignoring her.*] The priests brought the entire matter to the attention of your father—who remarked triumphantly to your mother—"I told you so!"

PRINCESS

How like him! Dear father!

NEB-KET

It was then that your father persecuted the Israelites. He forced them to live in special quarters of the towns. He gave each an allotment of labour, and appointed taskmasters over them. But this seemed

only to sharpen their wits, for they actually increased both in numbers and in wealth.

PRINCESS

Actually increased!

NEB-KET

Yes. It was quite a problem for your father. He didn't know whether to be sorry or glad, because while on the one hand, he didn't want any more Israelites, on the other hand, he did want more slaves; and while he despised their disgusting cupidity, he was always glad to have a sum of money available merely by torturing a few of the richest of them. However, your mother finally prevailed, and your father issued a decree ordering all the male children of the Israelites strangled at birth.

PRINCESS

But you said she was opposed to killing them.

NEB-KET

She was—until your father was in favour of letting them live.

PRINCESS

Father was quite right. Did not the Israelites once save Egypt from famine? Do you remember the scandal of Joseph and Potiphar's wife? Pharaoh made him his steward. They became quite

fashionable after that. People even had them as friends—quite nice people, too. It might be amusing to revive the fashion again.

NEB-KET

What do you mean?

PRINCESS

We princesses of the Royal House have much to look to. Our estates, the keeping of our accounts, the collecting of our tithes. Why entrust these duties to a stupid Egyptian, who has no talents but to write poetry or to rave over the colours of the desert sunset? No! Hereafter I shall employ an Israelite as overseer of my household.

TENATES

What?

PRINCESS

Yes, Nanny. I shall have my own private Israelite. Instead of spending his time praying, like an Egyptian, he shall spend his time on my accounts. Instead of making *himself* wealthy, he shall make *me* wealthy.

NEB-KET

[*Horrified.*] Princess!

TENATES

[*Rises angrily.*] The day you bring an Israelite into the house, I pack my things and go!

PRINCESS

Nonsense, Nanny. You have been threatening that for the last twenty years. I want an Israelite —at once.

NEB-KET

[*Remonstrating.*] But, Princess——

PRINCESS

[*Imperiously.*] Do as I bid you, or shall I have to go and find one myself?

NEB-KET

But—but—what sort of an Israelite?

PRINCESS

What sort? Why, he should be—er—intelligent, and——

MYRA

Young and handsome.

TENA

And strong.

SEMAR

With dark, flashing eyes.

PRINCESS

Yes—yes. And a red mouth—quite, quite red.

TENATES

[*Dryly.*] Are you seeking an overseer or a lover?

PRINCESS

Ssh! The idea. He must be well brought up—a gentleman.

TENATES

[*Scornfully.*] A gentleman—well brought up! Do jackals bring forth lions?

PRINCESS

Well, get me a baby, and let Nanny bring it up. I'll wager it will be a gentleman—if it survives. [MOSES, *uncomfortable and hungry in his basket, begins to cry.*] What is that?

MYRA

A baby. Hidden in the rushes. [MYRA *looks among the rushes. The others follow her excitedly.* MYRA *stoops down as she discovers the baby.*] Here, in a basket.

PRINCESS

A baby?

MYRA

It's a male baby. An Israelite.

PRINCESS

Ammon—or some other god—has heard me! He shall be *my* Israelite! Let me look at him. [MYRA *lifts the basket on to the embankment. The girls cluster around it.* MYRA *takes the baby out of the basket and hands it to the* PRINCESS. *The* PRINCESS *talks to the infant.*] The sweet little thing! Did its mother put it in the nasty old bulrushes? Look at him, Nanny. Isn't he sweet?

TENATES

More foolishness!

PRINCESS

Oh, he's a little love, he is. Spotlessly clean, too. Look, Nanny, see his sweet little hands, and the serious look in his eyes. There! He's smiling at you, Nanny!

TENATES

[*Softening.*] There! The pretty! There! There! The mother ought to be flogged. See how red its face is. Too many clothes. And sucking its thumb. Forming bad habits already.

PRINCESS

Perhaps it is hungry.

TENATES

[*With the air of an expert.*] Its little stomach is

quite empty. [*She takes the infant and assumes full charge.* MIRIAM *comes in quietly and watches the group around the baby.*] We must get the child a wet-nurse at once. There's Mana, wife of that lazy gate-keeper. Run to her, Myra, and tell her to come to the Palace at once.

MYRA

Mana! She has scarcely milk enough for her own brat.

MIRIAM

[*Timidly.*] If you please, Princess——

PRINCESS

Yes, child?

MIRIAM

Princess, I know a woman, an Israelite woman, whose child has been taken from her. She would be glad to nurse the baby.

PRINCESS

Good! Run and tell her to come to the Palace, little girl. Come, let us return. [MIRIAM *starts to go in the direction taken by her mother, looks at the basket, hesitates, then goes off.*]

NEB-KET

But your bath!

PRINCESS

It can wait.

NEB-KET

But the gods!

PRINCESS

They can wait!

NEB-KET

But they have blessed the water!

PRINCESS

It will have to stay blessed until tomorrow. [SEMAR *picks up the basket.*]

SEMAR

Shall we bring this along?

TENATES

No. It's a rubbishy thing. Throw it away. [SEMAR *drops the basket.* NEB-KET, *not knowing what to make of this new prank of his charge, shrugs his shoulders and follows the women. After they have gone* MIRIAM *returns and picks up the basket.*]

MIRIAM

A rubbishy thing! What is the matter with it? How wasteful these Egyptians are! [*She goes off, carrying the basket.*]

CURTAIN

MOSES

SCENE ONE

A great hall in the Palace of PRINCESS BINT-ANATH, *at Per-Ramses, some twenty-four years later. Across the rear wall is a platform, at the centre of which is a wide throne of basalt. A flight of steps leads from the throne to the stone floor. Large coloured curtains hang from each side of the hall. One of these curtains obstructs our view of a portico leading to the exterior of the Palace, which is reached by walking to the left of the steps. The other curtain cloaks a portico leading to the domestic quarters of the Palace. The floor is bare except for a few mats. The largest of these mats is near the curtain which cloaks the portico leading to the exterior.*

MOSES *is seated on a low stool which stands on this mat, reading a scroll of papyrus. Other scrolls lie scattered over the mat. Writing instruments stand upon another stool which is somewhat higher than the stool upon which* MOSES *is seated.*

MOSES *is a young man of about twenty-four*

years of age, bearded, tall, and rather thin. He has an air of intensity and seriousness; he is clothed simply, and wears no jewelry or headdress. After reading for a few moments, Moses *takes the writing instruments and makes some changes in the scroll which he has been reading.*

Miriam, *a beautiful young woman in her early thirties, dressed richly in a coloured robe, with jewels in her hair and on her hands, comes in from the domestic quarters of the Palace and goes over to where* Moses *is sitting.*

Miriam

Greetings, Moses. At work again?

Moses

[*As he writes.*] Yes, Miriam.

Miriam

Not at the Princess's accounts, I'll wager.

Moses

[*Looking up.*] You are disturbing me, sister.

Miriam

Brother, do take care! Surely it is not just to the Princess, who has had you taught by the best of instructors, to neglect her affairs as you do.

MOSES

[*Placing the writing instruments back on the higher stool.*] You are right, Miriam. I shall stop at once. But let me read you what I have just written—may I?

MIRIAM

Of course you may. I am interested in everything my brother writes. Read! [*She sits on a cushion at the feet of* MOSES.]

MOSES

[*Reading from the scroll, proudly.*] "In the regulation of his conduct by law, doth Man differ mainly from the beast. There can be no law without authority and no authority higher than that of a god. But in Egypt and Syria, there are many gods, and the priests of one god promulgate laws which cannot be obeyed without breaking the laws promulgated by the priests of other gods; so that there is nothing but confusion. The children of Israel, having but one god and one authority, alone of all the peoples, can have a perfect law." How do you like that, sister?

MIRIAM

Horribly dull. Why do you not write poetry?

MOSES

I, Moses, write poetry?

MIRIAM

Writing poetry is just as important as writing laws.

MOSES

I have finer dreams than poetry. I leave that to the Egyptians. I have something to say to you, sister.

MIRIAM

You are very young, brother.

MOSES

I am old enough to know that men are governed by laws, and not by poetry; if you will except this Palace, where the air is so full of the scent of myrrh and frankincense, that I am stifled by it.

MIRIAM

Come, Moses. You need a holiday. You are stifled by the dust from that old papyrus.

MOSES

Will you please take me seriously, sister. Can I talk to you about myself, or can't I?

MIRIAM

My dear brother, when a man wants to talk about himself, he will do it whether his listener takes him seriously or not. Go on!

MOSES

We have both shut our eyes to what is going on in the Palace.

MIRIAM

[*Opening her eyes very wide.*] *My* eyes are open.

MOSES

We live here in the lap of luxury—you, the Princess's favourite dancer; I, the overseer of her estates.

MIRIAM

Do you complain of your good fortune?

MOSES

The Princess employs me because I am an Israelite, thinking that I have the talent to increase her wealth. But I have no patience with bargaining and keeping accounts, and no stomach for it either; so that instead of managing the Princess's estates, I have thoroughly mismanaged them. It will not be long before she dispenses with my services.

MIRIAM

Why do you not attend to your duties?

MOSES

I have no desire to be valued for talents I neither possess nor wish to possess.

MIRIAM

[*Fondly.*] You will never succeed in the world, Moses. You have too much conscience. What will you do if she discharges you?

MOSES

I shall go and live among the Children of Israel.

MIRIAM

[*Horrified.*] What? Those awful people?

MOSES

[*Gently reproachful.*] They are our people, sister.

MIRIAM

But we are different. We were brought up in the Palace.

MOSES

They are none the less our people, sister. I remember, when I was a child, our mother took me to see our father in the brickfields. Think of it, sister, our own father, a cringing slave, a bondsman. His skin was burned almost black from toiling in the blazing sun, while mine was soft, and anointed with sweet oils; he wore a few rags upon his back, while I was dressed in finespun coloured linen. My heart bled for his humiliation. As I left his hovel with our mother, I passed some Israelites chained together; old men, young boys, and men so worn with toil, you could not tell whether they were young or

old; their backs were bowed under heavy burdens, and as they dragged themselves along, a huge Egyptian taskmaster lashed at them with a heavy leathern thong. Some of them fell under the weight of their burdens, dragging the others with them; and as they all lay huddled together on the ground, that great brute of an Egyptian flogged and flogged them until his arm tired, and he could flog them no longer. Child as I was, I tried to strike him; my mother held me back. I came home to the Palace; I wept. Ptolomeus, my stern old teacher, saw me crying. "Do not weep for injustice," he said, "destroy it." Then I resolved that from that day on, I would never weep again for the Israelites.

MIRIAM

You were a sensitive child. Your eyes were as soft as a dove's eyes.

MOSES

The bricks of Per-Ramses are red with their blood.

MIRIAM

Many Egyptians fare no better than they do, brother. I have lived with the Israelites, and I know them; they feel their bondage less than you do. They are a narrow, industrious people, and if you tried to help them, they would not thank you for it. Come, let us forget them, brother; let us be glad that we live in the Palace, and be satisfied that

there is beauty and happiness in the world; and let us drink our fill of it.

MOSES

Shame, Miriam. God will punish you for your heartlessness.

MIRIAM

Do you expect me to weep, because I am not a slave?

MOSES

They will not always be slaves. Was it to live a life of luxury in a woman's palace that Jehovah spared my life? Is there no higher purpose in living than this? No, sister; I will not believe it: God shall guide my steps to higher paths.

MIRIAM

You will become a Prince of Egypt.

MOSES

Higher than that, sister; perhaps I shall be the leader of Israel. I may go among the Israelites, and with Jehovah's aid, deliver them from bondage.

MIRIAM

My poor brother, are you out of your senses? If Pharaoh freed them, they would fare far worse than they do now, for as slaves, they have a value and are given food and clothes; but as free men, they

will get nothing; indeed, the Egyptians will take away everything they possess.

MOSES

I shall lead them out of Egypt.

MIRIAM

[*Laughing.*] Lead them out of Egypt! What an idea!

MOSES

Miriam, are your eyes blinded? Do you not see that Egypt has corrupted our people? Egypt has turned them into traders and cheats, by forcing them to live like animals in a pen. But God will not suffer their oppression. He will guide them back to the land of their forefathers, the land of Canaan, where they will become a simple country people again. Canaan is not a plain like Egypt, flooded in the season by the swelling of the Nile. It has gentle hills and valleys, watered by the rains of Heaven itself.

MIRIAM

[*Admiringly.*] How well you talk, Moses. Why don't you learn to recite?

MOSES

Can you never be serious, Miriam? You have learned to chatter like the Egyptians, who talk of colour, line and form, while the land reeks with their abominations.

MIRIAM

The Egyptians have made a great civilization, Moses. Do not despise their works.

MOSES

And where has it led them? To lust and corruption; to luxury and softness; bestiality; and the degradations of the flesh which have made their men like women and their women like men; cruelty; the worship of beasts; slavery; oppression; injustice! Those are their works, and I despise them.

MIRIAM

If those were all their works, brother, I would despise them too. But what of the great temples; the carved walls of the cities; the great images of the gods; the groves of the burial places; the lotus-pillared palaces; and all the works of the artists and sculptors which are the glory of Egypt? Do you despise those?

MOSES

[*Scornfully.*] Stone images before which the idolators prostrate themselves in their wickedness. Yes, I despise them. I despise everything Egyptian.

MIRIAM

Hush, Moses! Someone will hear you. This is your country, while you are living here.

MOSES

Some day my feet will tread a cleaner soil.

MIRIAM

Well, let me remain here, I beg of you. I have no desire to be a simple country-woman. I like beautiful robes, and finely wrought jewels for my body. I like to dance in the great temples, and to witness the festivals of Ammon.

MOSES

Shame on you, Miriam. Have you become an Egyptian?

MIRIAM

No, Moses, but you have become a bore.

MOSES

One should not talk of such things to women.

MIRIAM

Forgive me, brother: Because I am a woman, perhaps I understand them better than you do. Your heart is kind, and you are touched by the suffering of our people; and so you wish to lead them out of Egypt, but for what? That they may become shepherds and cattle raisers, instead of brickmakers and builders? That they may delve in the earth of Canaan, instead of in the clay of the Delta? Better, say I, to stay here. But if it were your dream to take with you to Canaan all the beauty we have felt

in Egypt, to build there temples for Jehovah, to teach our people sculpture and all the other crafts, that they might make images in marble and in granite surpassing even those of Ramses, then I would cry: "Hail, Moses! Go forth and lead our people, and you shall find me with you!" But would you do that? Never. You despise such works. You love the law. Your temples are the temples of justice! Your images are the images of the mind. [THOTMES, *assistant to* MOSES, *has come in from the domestic quarters, and overheard the latter part of what* MIRIAM *has said. He is an effeminate-looking little man with a dissatisfied cast of countenance.*]

THOTMES

[*Approaching* MOSES.] Pardon me for interrupting this learned disquisition, but the Princess bids me remind you that she expects His Highness Ahmes, Lord of Soleb.

MOSES

[*Rises.*] I forgot all about it.

MIRIAM

[*Rising.*] Brother! The Princess will be beside herself.

MOSES

There was to be a feast! [*To* THOTMES.] What was it the Princess ordered?

THOTMES

Roasted quail stuffed with spices, served with a sauce of honey and cream, and a salad of spikenard.

MOSES

[*Backing toward the portico leading to the domestic quarters.*] Yes!

THOTMES

Hot goat's flesh with sweet wine.

MOSES

Yes, yes— [*Backing still further.*]

THOTMES

Raisin cakes with cinnamon——

MOSES

[*Rushing off.*] Yes! Let us hasten! We may yet prepare it in time! [MOSES *goes out through the portico leading to the exterior.*]

THOTMES

[*Grumbling.*] Hasten! Hasten! I have waited for his orders all day, and now I must hasten.

MIRIAM

If you were waiting, why did you not remind him earlier?

THOTMES

Why did I not? Why am I not in the favour of the Princess, though the office of overseer was mine until he came of age? Because of you! Because of him! [*Sneers.*] Israelites! [*He goes off after* MOSES. *The sound of trumpets is heard.*]

MIRIAM

[*Looking toward the exterior.*] The Lord of Soleb is arriving! [*She follows* THOTMES. *A slave enters and removes the stools, scrolls and cushions. As he goes off, the* PRINCESS BINT-ANATH, *now a mature woman, enters from the domestic quarters, followed by* NEB-KET, *courtiers and slaves.*]

PRINCESS

[*Walking towards the throne.*] Where is Moses? [*Angrily.*] Buried in an ancient scroll, I'll wager.

FIRST COURTIER

I will look for him. [FIRST COURTIER *goes back to look for* MOSES.]

PRINCESS

[*To a slave.*] The trumpets! [*Two slaves with trumpets go towards the portico leading out of the Palace, and sound a note of welcome, which is answered by trumpeters outside. An Envoy, leading an Ethiopian slave, whose hands are manacled together, comes into the hall from outside, and walks to the foot of the steps below the throne.*]

ENVOY

[*To the* PRINCESS.] My master, Ahmes, Lord of Soleb, in the Lower Waters of the Nile, greets your Highness, and presents you with this slave in token of his high esteem.

PRINCESS

[*Rises.*] Bear our thanks to your master. Bid him enter and accept our hospitality. [*The* ENVOY *bows and goes out, leaving the slave at the foot of the steps. The* PRINCESS *addresses* NEB-KET.] Why do they always send me Ethiopians? I detest them. [*She sits on the throne again.*]

NEB-KET

What shall they do with the slave, your Highness?

PRINCESS

Give him away. Poor fellow, he looks so miserable. Perhaps it would be more humane to kill him.

SECOND COURTIER

[*Sarcastically.*] Ammon will bless your kind heart!

NEB-KET

May I suggest—instead of merely killing him—that he be offered as a sacrifice to Horus?

PRINCESS

[*Smiling.*] You priests are so practical! I will

decide later. [*The* Second Courtier *leads the slave to the corner of the hall near the domestic quarters.*] Tell me, Neb-Ket, who is this Ahmes?

Neb-Ket

He is one of the lesser princes from the South, your Highness. Each year he journeys North to call upon your Royal Father, Pharaoh, who entertains him and the others like him lavishly. He comes to pay you homage, so he may boast on his return that he has broken bread with Pharaoh's favourite daughter.

Princess

These duties weary me!

Neb-Ket

He will be more interested in your dancing girls than in you, Princess!

Princess

What! Do you dare say that I have lost my beauty?

Neb-Ket

No, Princess, but you have lost your accessibility! What Lord of Egypt dare aspire to Pharaoh's daughter?

Princess

[*Pleased.*] Flatterer! I'll warrant I can turn this country prince's head, dancing girls or no danc-

ing girls! [AHMES, *a heavy, stupid-looking man, comes in, followed by his slaves who fan him, and courtiers. He walks clumsily up the stairs of the throne, slips and almost falls. He kisses the hand of the* PRINCESS.]

AHMES

[*Bowing, his mouth open and gaping at the magnificence of the hall.*] I am highly gratified—deeply gratified—[*He searches for a word*]—more than gratified——

PRINCESS

[*Graciously.*] Please do not make a speech, my lord. Was your journey pleasant?

AHMES

Not entirely, your Highness. I found the desert rather—er—dusty—quite— [*He stops to find another adjective.*]

PRINCESS

[*Teasing him.*] More than dusty? You shall have refreshments! [*She indicates that he is to sit upon the throne beside her.* AHMES *sits down.*] Our steward Moses should have met you at the threshold. Pray forgive our oversight. [*She claps her hands. Musicians, carrying drums and trumpets, come in from outside, pass across the hall and station themselves near the portico leading to the domestic quarters. The* PRINCESS *glances mischievously at* NEB-KET.] Oh, oh! I forgot. Do you wish my

dancing girls to entertain us? You must be tired of seeing so many in Per-Ramses!

AHMES

[*Brightening considerably.*] Oh, not at all, Princess. I find them—er—rather—well, you know, quite—you know—*very*——

PRINCESS

[*Coldly.*] Very? Oh, do you? [*She claps her hands again and glances at* NEB-KET, *who smiles discreetly. The musicians begin to play a plaintive rhythmic melody, with changes of time into a quick dance step, not unlike Hungarian gypsy music.* MIRIAM, *followed by a number of dancing girls, comes in from the domestic quarters. They dance with voluptuous movements, to the obvious delight of* AHMES, *who is quite enchanted with* MIRIAM. *The* PRINCESS *does not like the proceedings. She suddenly claps her hands at a moment when* AHMES *has almost involuntarily risen from the throne. The music stops abruptly. The* PRINCESS *addresses* MIRIAM.] That will do!

MIRIAM

But that is only the first movement.

PRINCESS

[*Tartly.*] It is also the last! Enough! [MIRIAM *makes a deep courtesy, followed by the other girls.*]

AHMES

[*Rising, gallantly.*] Permit me to thank your dancers for the—er—er—rather—quite—very——

PRINCESS

[*Yawns quite rudely.*] Oh, yes! [*To the girls.*] Run away. [*The girls rise and station themselves at one side.*] Is the feast prepared?

SECOND COURTIER

I will see. [*He goes off.*]

PRINCESS

[*Angrily.*] Where is Moses? Where on earth is Moses? Excuse me, my lord. [*She bounces down the steps and almost runs into* THOTMES *who is returning to the hall.*] Where is Moses?

THOTMES

He has gone to procure the food for the feast.

PRINCESS

What, only now, when I gave him every detail of instruction yesterday?

THOTMES

[*Maliciously.*] He was busy upon some work of law, your Highness!

PRINCESS

Again? He shall learn *my* law. Are my guests to starve?

THOTMES

No, your Highness. [*Rubbing his hands.*] I saw that Moses was not occupied with the affairs of your household, so I myself gave orders for the preparation of the feast. It can be served in the Lotus Hall, if your Highness so desires.

PRINCESS

Lead us there at once, Thotmes. [*To* AHMES.] My lord, the feast will be served at once. [*To* THOTMES.] Lead the way. [THOTMES, *going off to the domestic quarters, is followed by* AHMES *and courtiers, soldiers and servants.* MOSES *comes in from outside, looking very much hurried and flurried. The* PRINCESS *turns to* MOSES *angrily.*] Ah, Moses.

MOSES

[*Floundering.*] Princess, I—I——

PRINCESS

[*To* AHMES *and the courtiers.*] Seat yourselves; I will follow you. [AHMES *and the others go off;* MIRIAM *lingers. The Ethiopian slave stands in the corner unnoticed. The* PRINCESS *addresses* MOSES *angrily.*] Moses, this is the last affront. You are no longer needed here. Your post will be filled by

Thotmes. [Moses *bows his head. The* Princess *softens.*] Have you nothing to say, Moses?

Moses

No, Princess, I can think only of the love you have given me, and the poor return I have made.

Miriam

[*Coming forward.*] And myself, Princess? I have displeased you?

Princess

Your dancing is atrocious. You should exercise more. You are too fat.

Miriam

[*Taken aback.*] What! Me? Fat? Well! [*She suppresses her indignation.*]

Princess

Farewell, Moses. [*As she starts to follow the others, the Ethiopian slave springs upon her; he is armed with a small knife.* Moses *throws himself upon him. They struggle, and* Moses *gradually forces the knife back, and holds the slave pinioned by his manacles.*]

Moses

Drop the knife! [*The slave drops the knife.* Moses *picks up the knife and releases the slave who lies upon the floor.* Moses *hands the knife to the*

PRINCESS.] Let this be my return, Princess. [*Soldiers run in from the domestic quarters and seize the slave.*]

PRINCESS

[*Kicking the slave.*] Why did you attempt my life, dog of an Ethiopian?

SLAVE

[*Surlily.*] Did not her Highness say I should be killed?

PRINCESS

[*Kicks the slave again.*] You, a gift. You have nearly been my death. [*To the soldiers.*] Take him away. [*The soldiers lead the slave off. She addresses* MOSES.] I owe you my life, Moses. Forget that I told you to go.

MOSES

No, Princess. It is time for me to go. I do not serve you well.

PRINCESS

[*Takes his hand.*] Stay, Moses. I have forgiven you already.

MOSES

I am called to other work, Princess. I cannot stay here now.

PRINCESS

If you must go, you shall have your wish. But you shall leave a free man. [*She takes off her ring and gives it to him.*] Take this ring. It will in-

form all men that you are under my protection. You will return to see me?

MOSES

Gladly, Princess.

PRINCESS

I must join my guests. [*She goes off to join the others at the feast.* MOSES *stands looking at the ring.*]

MIRIAM

[*Exploding with indignation.*] Did you hear what she said? Fat. Me, fat. Why, Konetes is making an image of my body in clay. He says my body is perfect. Do *you* think I am fat, Moses?

MOSES

I know nothing about women.

MIRIAM

You must make a study of them, brother. You are such an innocent young goose. Shall we pack up and go?

MOSES

Are you going?

MIRIAM

Of course I am. Did she not say I was fat? Besides, who would there be to look after you, with your weak chest and your innocence?

MOSES

But I am going to live with the Israelites.

MIRIAM

Then you *will* need me. We'll go together.

MOSES

[*Takes her hand.*] You are a dear friend, Miriam, but what will you do among them? [*The musicians at the feast without begin to play a lively dance measure.*]

MIRIAM

[*Gaily.*] Protect your chest and your innocence, of course! Am I not Miriam, dancer to the Princess Bint-Anath? I can earn bread and wine for both of us. You take this drum. [*She gives him a drum which one of the musicians has left.*] Follow me, and we'll dance all over Egypt. [MOSES *beats the drum gaily.* MIRIAM, *laughing, dances off toward the portico leading outside,* MOSES *following her. The music continues.*]

THE INTERLUDE CURTAIN IS LOWERED

FIRST INTERLUDE

A street in Per-Ramses.

The music continues. MIRIAM *dances across the street, followed by* MOSES. *When she is halfway across, the music stops.*

MOSES

And am I to beat this drum all over Egypt?

MIRIAM

Yes, brother.

MOSES

How empty it sounds!

MIRIAM

Empty things make the greatest noise! If you would be a leader, brother, you must learn to beat the drum! [*The music commences again.* MIRIAM *dances off.* MOSES *sits upon the drum. The music becomes a dirge. Moaning is heard. A chain-gang of seven Israelites, old and young, their ankles manacled together, crosses the street, staggering*

under heavy burdens. Two huge Egyptians with leathern thongs flog them as they pass off. The memory of his childhood returns to MOSES.]

MOSES

The leathern thongs cut into their flesh, but their agony is mine, too! Their eyes are red with weeping, but the sorrow for which they weep is my sorrow, too! Their backs are bent in affliction, but my soul is crushed under their burden. [*He raises his arms heavenward.*] Jehovah! Lord! How long shall Thy people suffer? How long shall the sons of men flay and scourge them? Let the mantle of Thy might descend upon me, Lord! Fill me with Thy spirit! Let my two feet stand upon the earth like granite; let my arms reach up into the firmament and my blows send the stars staggering in their courses! [*With exultation.*] I shall lead Israel! I! I! [*He goes off, his eyes shining, his head high.*]

THE INTERLUDE CURTAIN RISES

SCENE TWO

A Market Place in the slaves' quarters of Per-Ramses. In the background rise the roofs of the hovels, palaces and temples of Per-Ramses. A platform at the rear of the market place supports a tent-like booth, which is gaily decorated with flags and inscriptions. The left-hand side of the platform is bare, and is roped off; wooden stairs lead from this to the ground.

It is late afternoon, and the market place presents a scene of animation. Israelite slaves, men and women, young and old, throng the place. Peddlers carrying trays of fruit pass and re-pass. Near the stairs leading to the booth, a group of old Israelites are sitting upon the ground, intent upon a game played with flat pieces of bone, not unlike modern playing cards. MOSES *comes out of the tent and places a large placard, showing a picture of* MIRIAM *as a dancer, outside the booth. He then mounts the platform and starts to beat upon a drum. Nobody takes any notice of him. He then takes a papyrus scroll which lies upon the*

platform and reads it, beating the drum listlessly as he does so. AARON, *a gaily-dressed young man, somewhat older than* MOSES, *comes in. He is dressed in the Egyptian mode, with conventional head-dress and beard. He takes the drum-stick from* MOSES' *hand, and beats vigorously upon the drum. He thus attracts the attention of the crowd.*

AARON

[*To* MOSES.] Let me show you how to do it, brother! [*He addresses the throng.*] What misfortune has come upon you, Israelites, that you wander to and fro when you have before you one of the wonders of Egypt: Miriam, daughter of Amram, of the tribe of Levi, formerly dancer to the Princess Bint-Anath, favourite daughter of Pharaoh! Ascend, O Israel, and see our sister Miriam dance the rhythms of tropical Nubia, as danced by her before the Princess Bint-Anath and all the Royal Family of Egypt! Ascend, O Israel, ascend! Ascend, ascend, O Israel!! [*A crowd troops up the stairs and enters the tent. Later, music is heard from within the tent.*]

MOSES

You have a silver tongue, Aaron!

AARON

Better than that, brother. 'Tis a tongue that

turns words into gold! [*An old blind woman passes across the market place crying: "Alms! In the name of Jehovah! Alms." She stops at the card players, all of whom give her money. She then goes off. The card players, who have been playing quietly up to this point, become more noisy.*]

ELIAZAR

[*A good-natured, rotund man.*] Go forth, my pretty Bunce! [*He plays a piece.*]

ABINADAB

[*A stout, pompous man.*] The Cosos takes it. [*He plays a piece.*] Anything higher than the Cosos? And now I play the Kenates! The game is mine.

ZUAR

[*A thin, evil-looking man.*] You have the luck of Ramses.

ABINADAB

All pay me, please. Ten, twenty, thirty, forty. [*The others hand him money.*]

ELIAZAR

[*To* ZUAR.] Why did you not play the Kono when I played the black Bunce? Let me see what you held.

ZUAR

[*Looking at pieces.*] Look! See there— [*Ac-*

cusingly to ELIAZAR.] It was you! You threw away the game! If, instead of playing your black Bunce, you had played the Cosos, and followed it with the red Kono, Abinadab would not have made a single trick!

ABINADAB

[*Complacently.*] Peace! Peace! [ABINADAB *rises.*]

ZUAR

Come, deal again. [*To* ABINADAB.] Where are you going?

ABINADAB

I am not playing any more.

ZUAR

[*Angrily.*] You leave with your winnings!

ABINADAB

I have to go to the waterside.

ZUAR

[*Rises.*] Do you expect a cargo of shell-fish?

ABINADAB

Yes. Why so sharp? Oh! So you are expecting a cargo, too!

ZUAR

And you will spoil my market, plague take you, as you did once before.

ABINADAB

[*Shrugs his shoulders.*] Did I know you were expecting such a cargo?

ZUAR

Do I shout my business from the roof-tops?

ABINADAB

[*Sneering.*] Yet we all know that you would take the bread out of the mouths of your own sons!

ZUAR

And that you lend gold at high usury to your brothers in affliction!

ELIAZAR

Peace, peace. Some Egyptian may hear us, and we shall all suffer punishment for trading. Come, play!

ZUAR

Let him go; with our gold jingling in his purse, he goes to see whether he cannot squeeze more out of us.

ABINADAB

[*Hotly.*] You lie! Did I know of your cargo? [*The others murmur against* ZUAR. MOSES *comes to the quarrelling group.*]

MOSES

I pray you, brethren, do not assemble here, in a public square, to brawl over your affairs.

ABINADAB

Indeed? I let no man tell me what I shall or shall not do.

MOSES

Unless he be an Egyptian.

ABINADAB

I bow to the Egyptians because they oppress us.

MOSES

Blame yourselves somewhat for their oppression, brethren. Had you not been in such haste to garner in their wealth, all these burdens would not have been laid upon Israel.

ABINADAB

Would you have us poor and servile?

MOSES

Servile you will always be, so long as you serve Mammon, rather than Jehovah.

ZUAR

How would you have us then?

MOSES

I would have you so that no man could point his finger at any one of you and say, as he can of you—[*He indicates* ABINADAB.]—and of you—[*He indi-*

cates ZUAR.]—that you are usurers and money-changers!

ZUAR

He insults us!

ELIAZAR

There is some truth in what he says. How would you have us, O wise young man?

MOSES

I would have you poor in worldly goods, Eliazar, yet rich in understanding.

ABINADAB

He is but a fool! Go back, you mummer, and beat upon your drum! [*The sharp metallic note of a bell is heard. The crowd comes trooping out of* MIRIAM'S *tent. Peddlers scurry off. An Egyptian official comes in. He is a heavy, brown-faced man. He carries a large knout and cracks it viciously from time to time. He is the eternal policeman.*]

OFFICIAL

[*Bullying.*] Now then! Hurry along! Hurry along! To work, to work, all of you! [*To the group of old Israelites.*] Now then, are you taking the evening off?

ABINADAB

Did I not pay you yesterday for today?

OFFICIAL

Did you? My memory is bad. I must have more today!

ABINADAB

[*Whining.*] Do you think we are made of gold?

OFFICIAL

That you might be! You Israelite slaves are always rich, no matter how much I take from you. Come, the money now, or to work you go! [*He flourishes his whip.* ABINADAB, *after consulting with the others, offers him some gold.*] Now double it.

ABINADAB

You will tear the very flesh from our bones!

OFFICIAL

That I will, if you keep me waiting. [ABINADAB *and the others consult again, and a sum of money is forthcoming, which* ABINADAB *gives to the* OFFICIAL.] Good! Do not blame me for taking this, my friends. It is the fault of Pharaoh's government.

ZUAR

[*Sneers.*] He calls us his friends.

OFFICIAL

That I am. They pay me a miserable wage. I have to live in the style of a man of my rank. Other-

wise I should lose my position. Come, clear out of here, or some higher official will be passing.

MOSES

[*Scornfully.*] And you will have to pay him a higher bribe.

OFFICIAL

[*Raises whip.*] What, you scum of the ditch!

ELIAZAR

[*To* OFFICIAL.] Do not strike him, Fares. He is under the protection of the Princess Bint-Anath. [*The* OFFICIAL *glares at* MOSES *but does not strike him.*]

ABINADAB

[*To* MOSES.] Do not anger him, Moses, or it will be the worse for us.

MOSES

[*Holding his ground, scornfully.*] What! You, so rich, and yet so servile? [*The old Israelites go off, muttering.*]

OFFICIAL

If you want to keep out of trouble, dog of an Israelite, you had better not bark so loudly, or next time—[*He lashes with his knout, turns on his heel, and goes off after the others.* MOSES *returns to the tent and sits upon the platform.* AARON *and* MIRIAM *come out of the tent.*]

MIRIAM

[*To* AARON.] You did well, brother. It was a good audience.

AARON

If Moses should leave you, Miriam, I shall take his place. Well, I must be going. I have an appointment.

MIRIAM

An appointment?

AARON

Precisely, I go to have my beard perfumed. I shall be late if I linger.

MIRIAM

Hurry, and avert a tragedy! [AARON *goes off.* MIRIAM *addresses* MOSES.] When you lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses, let our brother Aaron be your drum—he has both noise and emptiness

MOSES

I—lead the Israelites out of Egypt? That was an old dream of mine, sister. I have forgotten it.

MIRIAM

It was a good dream, brother. Why have you forgotten it?

MOSES

Living among them—learning what they are like.

They would pollute any land with their greed and usury.

MIRIAM

Do not be so intolerant, brother.

MOSES

We must be intolerant of what degrades us.

MIRIAM

We are intolerant of people only when we do not know them, brother. Do you remember how scornfully I spoke of them in the Palace? Yet living here among them, I have come to love them.

MOSES

And I who loved them, have also learned to scorn them.

MIRIAM

You do not know them, brother. If some of them are greedy, are they not also generous to a fault? They are all dreamers, Moses, just as you are; they can dream greater dreams than other people, so that when they dream of wealth, they become wealthier than other people.

MOSES

If their minds were upon God, they would not dream of wealth.

MIRIAM

We can change their dream, brother. Many of

them dream as you do, of righteousness, of perfection; and what is this perfection but a dream of God?

MOSES

God, a dream?

MIRIAM

Yes; we have never seen Him; never touched Him; only felt Him in our hearts. But people without imagination have never dreamed of Him; and can never love Him, for they cannot love a god they cannot see, so they love the wealth which they can see. So if we would change their dreams, brother, we must make an image of Jehovah, and teach the people to know Him and to love Him.

MOSES

[*Angrily.*] What, make the Israelites idolators, stone-worshippers? What wickedness is this?

MIRIAM

They will not worship the stone, brother; it will be the symbol of God.

MOSES

What you say is not only wicked; it is foolish and wicked. Can men make an image as great as the work which Jehovah Himself created in six days; light, darkness; the sun, the moon and all the stars in the firmament; the waters, and the earth, and all

the good that is in it? We have only to raise our eyes to see God.

MIRIAM

Then I must be blind, for that is not how I see Him. I think of Him as a man, a kindly father who loves his children and cares for them; if I could make images, I would make one of Him seated on His throne in a garden, and around Him I would place images of all His attributes; His love, His kindness. and His wisdom; and I would have the children of Israel walk in the garden among the images, and come to love God as a friend, and make companions of His virtues; then they would dream differently, brother.

MOSES

That is the way of the idolator, Miriam. God does not need images; He manifests Himself by His changeless laws, which make the tides flow and ebb, the days pass into the nights, and the summers follow the winters. He can make Himself manifest to Israel by the law of Israel.

MIRIAM

[*Scornfully.*] Can men love a law?

MOSES

Why are you so scornful of the law, sister? A just law protects the weak from the strong, and the righteous from the wicked.

MIRIAM

[*With a mock sigh.*] Oh, those righteous people! Sometimes I think we need a law to protect the wicked from the righteous! [BRITH, *a half-witted boy, comes shuffling aimlessly across the market place.*]

MOSES

Look, there is Brith, the half-wit! Under the law, he may not be molested by any man, be he prince or slave!

MIRIAM

That may be written in the law, but what is written in the hearts of the people? [*The Egyptian official returns. He approaches* BRITH *and menaces him.*]

OFFICIAL

Now then, what do you mean, loafing here! Off to work with you! [*He lashes at* BRITH.]

BRITH

[*Stutters.*] Me—no—me—no!

OFFICIAL

[*Beating him.*] Get along, you dog! [MOSES *steps out between the Egyptian and* BRITH *and prevents another savage attack on the boy, who has fallen to his knees.*]

MOSES

Hold back. That is Brith, the half-wit. The law does not require him to labour.

OFFICIAL

A fig for the law! Get out of my way, or it will be the worse for you!

MOSES

[*Commandingly.*] Do not touch him! [*The* OFFICIAL *lashes the boy.* MOSES *falls on him. There is a scuffle. Both drop to the ground.* MOSES *catches the* OFFICIAL *around the throat. In the fracas, the head of the* OFFICIAL *crashes against the stairs leading to the platform. He groans and lies lifeless.* MOSES *rises.*]

MIRIAM

Is he stunned?

MOSES

[*Listening to hear whether the Egyptian still breathes.*] No. He is dead. May God forgive me!

MIRIAM

Brother!

BRITH

[*Staring at the body.*] He is dead!

MIRIAM

[*To* BRITH.] Do not speak of this to a soul. Do you understand?

BRITH

[*Transfixed with fear and staring at the body.*] He is dead! He is dead! He is dead! [*He backs away from the body, then with a cry, runs out of the market place.*]

MIRIAM

Quick, brother, let us hide it. [*They carry the body into the tent. A chain-gang of seven Israelites, accompanied by the taskmasters lashing them, crosses the market place, as in the First Interlude.* MOSES *comes out of the tent in time to see them. He stands transfixed.* MIRIAM *comes out of the tent.*]

MIRIAM

[*Noticing* MOSES' *horror-stricken appearance.*] Brother, take care. You must appear as though nothing had happened, or suspicion will fall upon us. [MOSES *nods his head in assent. The old Israelites,* ABINADAB, ZUAR, HELON *and* ELIAZAR, *quarrelling as before, return to the market place.*]

ELIAZAR

I beg you, let this young man Moses decide. He is well versed in the law.

ABINADAB

In commerce there is but one law—that every man is for himself.

MIRIAM

[*To* MOSES.] Speak to them, Moses!

MOSES

What would you have me do, brethren?

ELIAZAR

I am tired of their arguments. Both have a cargo of shell-fish arriving at the waterside today, so that one will spoil the market of the other.

MOSES

Not ten days since, three of your brethren who ate of shell-fish died of it. The law should forbid the eating of unclean food. [BRITH *returns.*]

ABINADAB

[*Scornfully.*] The law should forbid it! You call him a man versed in the law! Why, Brith here knows better law than that!

BRITH

There! He killed the Egyptian taskmaster—there! He killed him!

ABINADAB

Who?

BRITH

[*Points to* MOSES.] He—he killed him! [BRITH *runs away from them.*]

ZUAR

[*Alarmed.*] What has happened? [*To* BRITH.] What is it? [BRITH *runs off.*] Is it true, Moses?

ELIAZAR

If it be so, Moses, look to yourself. Not even Pharaoh's daughter can protect you.

ABINADAB

[*Maliciously.*] The young man learned in the law! Are you versed in the law of killing?

MIRIAM

[*To* MOSES.] Come within. [*They enter the tent.*]

ABINADAB

They will lay more burdens upon us all if this has been done. [*A young Egyptian Captain of the Watch, and soldiers come in. They drag* BRITH *along with them. One of the soldiers carries a torch.*]

CAPTAIN

Where was it?

BRITH

I—I—not——

CAPTAIN

Speak! Where was it? [BRITH *is silent. The* CAPTAIN *addresses the soldiers.*] Loosen his tongue! [*Two soldiers take* BRITH's *arms and begin to twist them.*]

BRITH

There! He killed him there!

CAPTAIN

Where is this Moses? Have any of you seen him? [BRITH *points to the tent.*]

BRITH

There!

CAPTAIN

[*To the soldiers.*] Post yourselves at either side. [*A woman, heavily veiled, leaves the tent and descends the stairs.*] Who is that?

ELIAZAR

It is Miriam, the dancer. [*The* CAPTAIN *scrutinizes her. She goes off. He then mounts the steps and enters the tent, sword in hand.*]

ZUAR

It will go badly with us for this. [*The* CAPTAIN

comes out of the tent, leading MIRIAM *dressed in the robe of* MOSES.]

CAPTAIN

[*Surprised at her youthful appearance.*] Are you Moses?

MIRIAM

I tell you, no.

CAPTAIN

Is he such a lad? [*To* ABINADAB.] Do you know this Moses?

ABINADAB

[*Grudgingly.*] Yes.

CAPTAIN

A torch! [*A soldier hands him a torch, which he holds to* MIRIAM'S *face.*] Is this he?

ABINADAB

It is Miriam.

CAPTAIN

[*To the soldiers.*] Don't stand there gaping! Run to the gates and have every woman stopped. Go with him, greybeards, and pick him out if you see him. Hurry now, or I will have you all flogged. [*The soldiers and the old Israelites hasten off to the gates.*]

MIRIAM

[*Laughing.*] Go with them, Captain. It will profit you little to stay here!

CAPTAIN

You will come with me.

MIRIAM

Where?

CAPTAIN

To the Civil Court, where you will receive sentence for aiding the escape of a murderer.

MIRIAM

What, and disgrace your glorious uniform, which fits you so well?

CAPTAIN

Disgrace? What disgrace?

MIRIAM

Would you force me to tell the Civil Court how easily a woman fooled you? That would make the Army the laughing-stock of Egypt!

CAPTAIN

You are under arrest!

MIRIAM

[*Coaxing.*] I appeal to you as an officer and a gentleman. The dignity of the Army must be upheld at all costs!

CAPTAIN

I can uphold the dignity of the Army, thank you!

MIRIAM

But your own dignity? Shall it be said that a Captain of the Guard could not tell the difference between a man and a comely young woman? That would not only make the Army the laughing-stock of Egypt, it would make *you* the laughing-stock of the Army!

CAPTAIN

[*Weakening.*] What?

MIRIAM

Even military men would be shocked at your stupidity! You would lose any hope of promotion. No, I will not permit you to arrest me. If you will not uphold your own dignity, then I must do it for you.

CAPTAIN

[*Discomfited.*] May the curses of Set fall upon you! [MIRIAM *laughs at him. He goes off.*]

MIRIAM

[*Falls to her knees.*] O God of Israel, protect Thou my brother!

THE INTERLUDE CURTAIN IS LOWERED

SECOND INTERLUDE

A Plain in Midian, fifteen years later. MOSES *walks across the plain, carrying a shepherd's crook and a lighted lantern. He is now a bearded, middle-aged man. He stops and places the lantern on the ground.*

MOSES

The mantle of night has fallen upon the Plain of Midian. The sheep are gathered into the fold, the bells of the cattle are stilled. . . . There is a great calm and peace in the wilderness. The night does not throb with the humming of insects, as in Egypt. Here I am alone with myself, and lo, I have come to know myself; to master myself; and to turn my thoughts upon God. Behold, the desires of my body have been cleansed by the desert sands; the lusts of my flesh have been stilled by the quiet of the great spaces. I am as a man who has bathed in a clear pool. Verily, the wilderness is a place for the purification of the soul, to bring a man closer to his Maker. Who is there so base that can lie here and look up at the star-lit Heavens, and not dwell upon the

wonders of God and His infinite greatness? . . . Yes, here I will abide, here in Midian, content, living simply, and walking in the paths of righteousness. . . . Yet there is a pain in my heart which will not be stilled. The voices of my brethren in Egypt, the cries of their affliction, ring in my ears and fill me with sorrow. Alas, I cannot help them! They are tainted with the vileness of Egypt. They lust after the flesh-pots. They will not turn to God. Oh, that they might abide here in the wilderness, as I have done; that their desires might turn to Jehovah! [*He sighs.*] Alas, why do I spend my thoughts in vain longings? I am weary. The earth is sweet and sleep awaits me. [*He removes an outer robe and makes a pillow of it. He then extinguishes his lantern, places his head upon his robe, and falls asleep. A vision of the chain-gang of Israelites, with the Egyptian task-masters beating them, passes across the place; a beam of intense white light falls upon* Moses *from above.*]

The Great Voice

[*Deep, sonorous, ringing.*] Moses, Moses!

Moses

[*Looking up.*] Here am I. Who art thou?

The Great Voice

I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob! [Moses

hides his face.] I have seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard them cry by reason of their taskmasters. Come now, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt into a good land and a large, a land flowing with milk and honey which I promised to your father Abraham.

MOSES

Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

THE GREAT VOICE

I will be with thee. Depart at once to Egypt. I will be thy voice, and will be with thy mouth and will teach thee what thou shalt do! [*The beam of light fades away.*]

MOSES

[*Awakes.*] What have I dreamed? Was it a dream? [*He rises.*] Or have I been in the very presence of God? . . . What matter? I am the servant of Jehovah. I will do His bidding. I will go down to Egypt. I will shatter the yoke which Pharaoh has laid upon my people. I will lead them forth out of Egypt into the land of Canaan! [*He picks up his cloak and lantern.*] I will set out for Egypt—this very night! [*He strides off.*]

THE INTERLUDE CURTAIN RISES

SCENE THREE

A public place at Per-Ramses. In the background, a great temple; against the temple is a high platform, gaily decorated with flowers, and banners at each corner. The platform is mounted by high, broad stairs, and in the centre is a magnificent double throne under a rich canopy.

The place is filled with a crowd of chattering Israelites, men and women, of all ages. Cries are heard: "They come, they come!" Egyptian soldiers enter the crowd and begin clearing a passageway for Moses *and* Aaron. *Cries of: "Moses!" "Aaron!" "Saviour!" "To Jerusalem!" from the people, rise to a roar as the two brothers pass through the surging crowd and mount the stairs, followed by* Miriam. *Half-way up they stop, and* Aaron, *lifting up his right arm, quiets the people.*

Aaron

Peace be with you, Israel! I speak to you as the mouthpiece of my brother Moses. We are gathered

here, brethren, because Jehovah has softened the heart of Pharaoh, so that at last he has granted us an audience! But we will not speak to Pharaoh unless we can speak as the voice of all Israel. Therefore, if there be any one among you who would not have us go to Pharaoh, then let us hear him now. Are there any among you? Come! Speak! [*The people chatter.*]

FIRST ISRAELITE

There are many. [ABINADAB *rises from the crowd and mounts the stairs. People cry:* "*Abinadab!*" "*The rich usurer!*" "*Down with Abinadab!*" "*No; he gives much to charity!*"]

ABINADAB

Brethren, I am known to you as one of the Elders of Israel. Before this Moses appeared among us we suffered hardships. We were forced to work as slaves——

SECOND ISRAELITE

Were you a slave?

ABINADAB

Or to pay heavy—er—er——

MIRIAM

[*Helping him.*] Bribes!

ABINADAB

[*Angrily.*] Not bribes, assessments—assessments —to the Egyptian officials. [*People cry: "Bribes!" "Peace!" "Silence!"*] But since this Moses has craved audience of Pharaoh and proclaimed himself a prophet of Jehovah, our burdens have increased tenfold!

THIRD ISRAELITE

[*Jeering.*] They made you work!

FIRST ISRAELITE

Let him speak!

ABINADAB

Brethren, let your aching backs, bared so often to the lash these latter days, let them speak to you. They will tell you better than I can what you owe to this Moses, this Saviour. [*He pauses. Some people cry: "He is right!"*] You are promised an audience with Pharaoh. Do you think he will let you go out of Egypt? And the land of Canaan, do you know where it is? It lies many days' march through the desert, where your wives and little ones will perish of thirst under the burning sun. [*Murmurs of: "He speaks wisely."*] And will the people who now dwell in this "promised land"—the Canaanites—will they hail you as their brothers, and say to you, "This is our land, take it with our blessing"? No, brethren, before you can possess this land you must fight, not one, but many battles, with the desert at your backs,

without food, and without shelter for your women. I tell you this Moses is a madman who will bring death and destruction upon us if we listen to him. Get you back to your hovels, Israel, for though you suffer at the hands of the Egyptians, yet you have not perished utterly! Jehovah in His own good time will deliver you. [*He descends the steps. People cry, "Well said, Abinadab!" "He speaks the truth!"*]

MOSES

[*To* AARON.] I will answer! [*To the people, with great fervour.*] Silence! There were many among you who cried, "Well said." True, O Israel! Pharaoh himself could not have spoken fairer! You have heard the voice of Abinadab, but the words he spoke, were they not the words of Pharaoh? What did he counsel you to do? To remain here in Egypt, bleeding under the lash of the taskmaster; crushed in the mills of the oppressor; was that not his counsel? And is that not evil counsel; is that not the counsel of Pharaoh? [*Some of the Israelites cry: "It is good counsel," others cry: "It is evil."*] I am slow of speech, but my faith in Jehovah has opened my lips. Harken then to my voice, and through me to the voice of your God; for what I say to you is put into my mouth by God, who has chosen me to lead you out of this land of abomination and corruption. Place yourselves in my hands, Israel, and fear not, for you are the children of God, and He will not suf-

fer harm to come upon you if you follow me! Behold how He has afflicted the Egyptians with plague and pestilence; He has appointed terror over them, and Egypt is filled with the sounds of weeping and the gnashing of teeth! Already they cry out to Pharaoh, to let you go out of Egypt. But if Pharaoh hardens his heart and will not let you go, then shall Jehovah set His face against him in fury; He shall make the skies as iron, and the earth as brass, and He shall crush Pharaoh between them; he shall sow his seed in vain, for his enemy shall eat it; and God shall bring his cities to ruin and his sanctuaries to desolation! Children of Israel, I do not bring you counsel! I bring you a command! Prepare this day to return to your own land, the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, which Jehovah promised as an inheritance to your father Abraham! Behold, the stranger is within your gates, and within the houses only strange tongues are heard! Follow me this day, Israel, and God shall bless you and all that is yours; your land, the fruit of your body, the fruit of your ground, the increase of your cattle and the young of your flock! Put your faith in me; I will throw off your yoke; I will deliver you from Egypt; I will lead you to Canaan! God has girded our loins with strength; God is with us today! Arise, Israel, and follow me out of Egypt! Arise and enter upon your inheritance! [*The people cry: "Moses!" "Our Leader!" "We will follow you!" A fanfaro-*

nade of trumpets is heard. A group of Egyptian soldiers come in and push the people aside. People cry, "Pharaoh comes, Pharaoh comes!" MOSES, AARON *and* MIRIAM *descend the steps. A* HERALD *comes in, followed by trumpeters.*]

HERALD

Bow down to Ramses, Pharaoh of Egypt, Beloved Son of the Gods Ammon-Ra, Osiris and Isis! [*The people sink to the ground, their heads down, and remain prostrate in the presence of* PHARAOH. MOSES, AARON *and* MIRIAM *stand to one side of the steps. The* HERALD *mounts the stairs. A group of girls come in, scattering flowers, followed by Nubian slaves carrying a palanquin in which are seated* RAMSES II *and his Syrian wife* NEFRETI. RAMSES *is a wizened old man who looks rather tired and done up. His neck is bandaged heavily. The palanquin is followed by some Syrian Ladies-in-Waiting, the High Priest of Ammon, and a crowd of government officials. They walk towards the stairs.*]

NEFRETI

[*A petulant, middle-aged lady with dyed hair.*] Stop! I will not go up there, Ramses, until you are quite sure there are none of those loathsome frogs about!

PHARAOH

[*Mildly.*] But, my dove——!

NEFRETI

I say it, and I mean it!

PHARAOH

But this boil on my neck!

NEFRETI

You are not going to walk up on your neck, are you? [*To a Lady-in-Waiting.*] He makes more fuss of his neck than all the rest of the Court put together. And the frogs! They make me so nervous. I dread going anywhere. [*She shrieks and half jumps out of palanquin.*] There, I nearly stepped on one! Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

PHARAOH

[*Who has stepped out of the palanquin and walks up the stairs.*] There are no frogs here.

NEFRETI

Are you quite, quite sure?

PHARAOH

[*Looking down as well as his stiff neck permits him.*] Quite sure, my dove.

NEFRETI

Have you looked under the throne?

PHARAOH

[*To* HERALD.] Look under the throne.

NEFRETI

No, *you* do it. He is so careless. What a lot of disgusting people! Who are they?

HIGH PRIEST

Israelites, your Majesty.

NEFRETI

Israelites? I thought they were all dead.

HIGH PRIEST

Not yet, your Majesty.

NEFRETI

[*To* PHARAOH.] Is it all right?

PHARAOH

Quite, my dove. [NEFRETI *descends from the palanquin. She walks up the stairs, accompanied by the High Priest of Ammon, and followed by her Ladies-in-Waiting and the government officials.*]

NEFRETI

They say that the frogs are frightfully thirsty since the Nile dried up, poor things. It is simply

dreadful here, simply dreadful. I tell Ramses we are under a curse.

PHARAOH

[*Meeting her.*] Please don't fuss.

NEFRETI

I am not fussing. It is a curse, that is what it is. I wish I were back in Syria.

PHARAOH

But these people are waiting for an audience.

NEFRETI

Are they more important than I am? You see, he insults me with every word he utters.

PHARAOH

You misunderstand me. [*He tries to take her hand.*]

NEFRETI

Let go my hand! Start the wretched audience, and get it finished!

PHARAOH

[*To* HERALD.] Call the spokesman of the Israelites.

NEFRETI

Who are these Israelites? Aren't they those dreadful people you said you would exterminate years ago?

PHARAOH

There are so many different tribes of slaves, it is hard to remember them all. Who are they, O High Priest of Ammon?

HIGH PRIEST

A small tribe of Semites, your Majesty; they have always been distinguished for the excellent opinion they have of themselves.

PHARAOH

Ah, yes, I remember now. They want to leave Egypt. They have been bothering me for years.

HIGH PRIEST

It will be better to exterminate these people before it is too late.

PHARAOH

Too late for what?

HIGH PRIEST

These people believe in two excessively dangerous doctrines, your Majesty. First they believe that there is only one God; second, they regard life as more important than death; and instead of devoting the greater part of their time to preparation for the afterlife, they are satisfied with their life on earth.

PHARAOH

Is that dangerous?

HIGH PRIEST

Excessively dangerous, your Majesty. They will try to improve their condition on earth; the slaves will rise up and demand happiness and justice; and then what will become of you, your Majesty?

PHARAOH

For that matter, what will become of you?

HIGH PRIEST

Whether there be one god or one hundred, we priests can be counted on to take care of our own skins, your Majesty. Still, if men are ever content with worshipping one god, there may come a time when they will worship no god at all; to that extent, the priesthood is involved. But I have not touched upon the greatest danger to be feared, which is this: as these people did not believe in the struggles of the soul in the afterlife, and in its re-incarnation, they devoted themselves to commerce, and instead of using the greater part of their gain to build temples and burial places, they kept it for themselves and their children; and it was for this reason that we made them slaves.

PHARAOH

Is there any fear of their religion spreading?

HIGH PRIEST

As yet, no. People will not easily be converted to the worship of a god they cannot see; and these people make no image of their god. But some day a prophet may arise among them and proclaim an image or a symbol, like a pillar or a cross, and then the worship of this god may spread like a plague to all the four corners of the earth. That would mean the end of civilisation; they will tear down the images of the gods, destroy the fountains, and sow the gardens with grass; they will turn the temples into market places, and the shouts of the bargainers will silence the voices of the poets. [*Discreetly.*] It would therefore appear to be most desirable to exterminate them, your Majesty!

NEFRETI

Are you going to let him talk all day?

PHARAOH

[*To* HERALD.] Proceed.

HERALD

[*Calls at the head of the stairs.*] Let the spokesman of Israel appear and render obeisance to Pharaoh. [MOSES *and* AARON *walk up the stairs.*

They approach the throne with simple dignity.] Bow down to Pharaoh!

MOSES

I am the servant of Jehovah. I bow only to Jehovah.

HERALD

[*Amazed.*] You dog! [*The soldiers advance toward* MOSES. *He stands his ground, his eyes meeting theirs. They stand transfixed, then fall back.*]

MOSES

Ramses, Pharaoh of Egypt, I am the voice of Jehovah!

PHARAOH

[*To* NEFRETI.] Jehovah? Who is he talking about?

NEFRETI

It is probably this new god. We must be careful. [*She turns tactfully to* MOSES.] We quite understand, my good man. And who *is* your god?

MOSES

[*To* PHARAOH, *ignoring* NEFRETI.] I command you, Pharaoh, in the name of Jehovah, God of Israel. Let my people go out of Egypt.

PHARAOH

[*Uneasily, to* HIGH PRIEST.] Will Ammon protect me against this Jehovah?

HIGH PRIEST

I am High Priest of Ammon. You have my personal assurance——

MOSES

[*Interrupting.*] Do you dare to defy Jehovah?

HIGH PRIEST

Israelite slave, do you speak thus to Pharaoh?

MOSES

[*His eyes blazing.*] I speak in the name of God. Are you blind, Pharaoh? Have you not seen how the flame of His anger consumes Egypt; how the sword of His vengeance smites you with plagues; by the drought which has burned up your fields; by the insects which have consumed your fruits; and by the pestilence which strikes down your children and destroys your first born. These are but the first angry breathings of His nostrils. But if you harken not in your pride, Pharaoh, then He shall break the power of your pride, though you be the greatest king on earth; He shall walk contrary to you in fury. You shall eat of the flesh of your sons, and of the flesh of your daughters. He shall destroy your

high places, and cast down your sun-images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols! And He shall make of all Egypt a waste and desolation; your cities shall be brought to ruin; all your cattle shall be destroyed, and all your children, and you; your living flesh shall fester into loathsome worms, and you shall perish in corruption.

PHARAOH

[*Quite frightened.*] But, but—be reasonable, my good man, be reasonable.

MOSES

Pharaoh of Egypt, let my people go!

HIGH PRIEST

Put them all to the sword! Let not one of them live. [NEFRETI *screams and jumps up on the throne.*]

NEFRETI

A frog! A frog! On my leg! Ah! Ah! Oh! Oh! [*All her ladies rush to her. She addresses* PHARAOH.] By Astarte! Did I not tell you to be sure to look under the throne? [*To a Lady-in-Waiting.*] My dear, I thought it was a mouse at first. What a shock! [*She turns on* PHARAOH *in a fury.*] Why don't you let them go, if they want to go?

PHARAOH

But, my dear, the astrologers claim it is all due to the fall of the Nile, and the climate——

NEFRETI

[*Interrupting.*] I have been telling you all along it is a curse. It is this God Jehovah. You have been upsetting Him for years. You are not fit to govern Egypt.

PHARAOH

I must consult with my ministers!

NEFRETI

That means you are too weak to make up your own mind.

PHARAOH

I wish you would not attack me so. If your neck— [*He rubs his neck.*]

NEFRETI

[*Interrupting.*] It serves you right. [*To* MOSES.] Pharaoh has decided. You may all go.

MOSES

[*Astounded.*] What?

NEFRETI

Go! Go!! Go!!! Go!!! [*She goes down off the throne and looks under it.*]

PHARAOH

[*Irritably.*] Yes, go! Go!! Go!!!

HIGH PRIEST

I protest.

NEFRETI

Hold your tongue!

MOSES

I shall announce your decree to my people.

PHARAOH

[*To* NEFRETI.] Shall he?

NEFRETI

No. You do it. [PHARAOH *rises.*]

PHARAOH

[*Rubs his neck and walks to top of the steps.*] Begone, Israelites! Get you out of Egypt! [*A few murmurs are heard.*] They don't seem particularly pleased over it!

ABINADAB

[*Rises.*] O great and mighty Pharaoh, if we are to go out into the desert without food or stores, what is to become of us?

PHARAOH

[*Shrugs his shoulders.*] I don't know, I'm sure.

ABINADAB

I ask that the treasure of gold and silver, the jewels and precious stones, which was taken away from us when we were made slaves, be returned to us by your officials.

PHARAOH

[*To* NEFRETI.] Shall we return them?

NEFRETI

Give them anything they want, so long as they go! [*Sotto voce.*] The world will consider you generous for giving them back their own belongings.

PHARAOH

Behold, Israelites, it shall be as you desire. Your treasure shall be returned to you. [*The Israelites cheer joyously, "Pharaoh! Pharaoh!"* PHARAOH *addresses* MOSES.] There. Does that satisfy you?

MOSES

God has opened your eyes in time.

NEFRETI

Come, let us go.

HERALD

Bow down. Pharaoh passes. [*The Israelites fall on their faces again.* PHARAOH *descends, followed by* NEFRETI, MOSES, AARON, *the* HIGH PRIEST *and officers.*]

NEFRETI

[*As she descends, to* AARON.] And there will be no more frogs?

AARON

No more, your Majesty.

NEFRETI

I warn you, if I step on a single frog after you have gone, I shall send our soldiers after you and bring your people back. [NEFRETI *and* PHARAOH *enter their palanquin.*]

PHARAOH

I don't like that man Moses. Do you know, my dove, he quite frightened me.

NEFRETI

You are always afraid.

PHARAOH

Well, I'm not afraid of frogs. [*The Royal Pair continue to argue as they are carried off in the same direction as they entered, followed by the other Egyptians.*]

MOSES

[*Mounts the stairs, addressing the people.*] Rise, Israel! [*They stand up.*] Hear, O Israel. The Lord your God, the Lord is One. God has

loosened your fetters. God will fulfill His promises. Disperse. Gather your belongings together, and prepare for your departure from Egypt. Return to this place at this time tomorrow, and I shall appoint among you captains of the hundreds, and captains of the thousands. Depart in peace, Israel. [*The people cheer.* MIRIAM *mounts the stairs and addresses them.*]

MIRIAM

Women of Israel! Let us rejoice! Let us go out of Egypt singing and dancing, with laughter on our lips and joy in our hearts. Rejoice, for you and your little ones shall drink deep of the milk of happiness, instead of the waters of bitterness! Rejoice, for the land is pleasant; and its ways are pleasant; its gardens are gardens of fountains, with beds of spices, and banks of sweet herbs beside the waters; its pastures are shaded with lign-aloes and cedars, and groves of pomegranates! Let us build there a great temple for Jehovah, a great palace for Jehovah, with pillars of white marble set on sockets of gold; and a great altar for Jehovah! Come, join me in a festival for Jehovah! We are His Brides! He is our Bridegroom! Let us dance before Him, before His altar! Let us make Him an offering of sweet wines and first-fruits! For His altar let us build Him an Image, a great image for the Bridegroom, an image for Jehovah!

MOSES

[*Breaking in.*] An image? What is this wickedness?

MIRIAM

[*Continues.*] A great image for the Temple of Jehovah!

MOSES

[*Commanding her.*] Be silent!

MIRIAM

[*Turning upon him angrily.*] Let me finish

MOSES

[*Imperiously.*] Silence! [*He addresses the people.*] Disperse! Go to your homes! [*The people go off chattering.* MIRIAM *and* MOSES *face each other.* MOSES *towers above her.* MIRIAM'S *eyes blaze in anger.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE FOUR

Outside Moses' *tent, before Mount Sinai, two years later. In the background rises Mount Sinai, nestled beneath which are the myriad tents of the Israelites, huddled together like a flock of sheep. At one side is a large tent, with a canopy of coloured cloth supported by red poles. Between this and another smaller tent on the opposite side is a platform which is used for services and for public meetings. Beneath the canopy of the large tent is a small table; there are stools and a small throne of Egyptian design in front of the table.*

Caleb, *scribe to* Moses, *is seated at the table writing upon a scroll of papyrus.* Miriam, *seated on a stool near him, is singing and embroidering a piece of coloured cloth.*

Miriam

[*Sings.*]

Sing ye to the the Lord,
Sing ye to the the Lord,

For He hath triumphed gloriously!
The Horse and his Rider,
The Horse and his Rider,
Hath He thrown into the Sea!

[SHAPHAN, *a young man of rough appearance, with tousled hair and beard, comes in past the small tent. He carries a small figure modelled in clay covered with a cloth. He listens as she sings, then comes forward, hesitating somewhat.* MIRIAM *welcomes him.*] Shaphan!

SHAPHAN

You seem happy, Miriam.

MIRIAM

And why not, Shaphan? At first I thought I should dislike the plains. Now I have come to love them.

SHAPHAN

Mount Sinai is beautiful—but we are all impatient to go on.

MIRIAM

My brother says we must wait here until the war between Egypt and Syria ceases, or they will crush us between them, like a hare in the jaws of a trap. [*She looks at the figure which* SHAPHAN *carries.*]

What is that? [SHAPHAN *takes the cloth off, disclosing the figure of a dancing girl.*] Oh, how lovely! [*She examines it admiringly.*]

SHAPHAN

[*Embarrassed.*] You. Dancing.

MIRIAM

Me? Oh, I am delighted! You *are* skilful, Shaphan. You must make me some others, will you?

SHAPHAN

[*Spluttering.*] But the new law—have you not heard? We cannot make any more! It is against the law!

MIRIAM

[*Puzzled.*] A new law?

SHAPHAN

Yes. I learned it by heart. "Thou shalt not make a graven image of any living thing that is upon the earth or in the Heavens above, or in the waters under the earth." They have destroyed all our things. I saved this for you. It is the last of all that I have made.

MIRIAM

It cannot be possible.

SHAPHAN

Miriam, will you not speak with Moses for us? If the law is not changed, it will destroy us all.

MIRIAM

I will speak with Moses at once.

SHAPHAN

Thank you, Miriam.

MIRIAM

Go in peace, Shaphan, I will do all I can for you.

SHAPHAN

May Jehovah shower blessings upon you. [*He goes off past the small tent.* MIRIAM *places the figure upon the table.* CALEB *looks up at it.*]

MIRIAM

Is it not beautiful?

CALEB

Go, destroy it, before Moses sees it.

MIRIAM

Tell me, do you like it, you old sphynx?

CALEB

[*Humorously.*] I am forbidden to like it. Still, I do.

MIRIAM

[*Covering the figure with the cloth.*] I shall show it to Moses. This law-making must stop. It has become a passion with him.

CALEB

Have you heard of his new project? A book called Deuteronomy is to be added to this book Exodus. [*He indicates the scroll on which he is working.*] In it is to be written every possible law to meet every possible situation.

MIRIAM

And all the impossible laws, I suppose, to meet all the impossible situations. You will be busy for years. [*She settles down to her sewing.*] Even as a child, he had a mania for rules and regulations. His dogs were the best trained animals in the Palace. [AARON *comes in by the large tent.*]

AARON

Hail, sister! What are you making?

MIRIAM

A robe for dancing.

AARON

Jethro says there will soon be a law against dancing.

MIRIAM

"Thou shalt not dance." Is dancing a sin?

AARON

He says that one cannot dance upon the path of righteousness. I think he is jealous that Moses made me High Priest. [*He examines the sewing on which* MIRIAM *is at work.*] Rather pretty! Oh, that reminds me, I've just thought about a costume for myself, the official robe of the High Priest.

MIRIAM

[*Ironically.*] Oh, you have started to work already.

AARON

I shall wear an ephod cut rather long and flounced somewhat at the side, in gold, blue and scarlet. Those colours suit me.

MIRIAM

I don't believe they could possibly suit anybody.

AARON

Do not interrupt, sister. Then I shall have a breastplate of gold, set with precious stones in rows, emeralds, diamonds, sapphires, jacynth, sardius, topaz, carbuncles, agates, amethysts, beryls, onyx and jaspers! An inspiration, isn't it?

MIRIAM

Brother! People will mistake you for a dealer in jewels! [JETHRO, *a sour-looking old man, stern and weather-beaten, comes in past the small tent.*] Here comes Jethro. Sit up straight!

JETHRO

[*To* CALEB.] I have been searching through the camp for my son-in-law, Moses.

AARON

He is sitting in judgment, Jethro.

MIRIAM

His favourite pastime since we left Egypt.

JETHRO

[*Sourly.*] Better that than sitting here in idleness.

MIRIAM

[*Aside to* AARON.] That is for you!

AARON

I am not idle. I merely appear idle. I have just finished designing the High Priest's robes.

MIRIAM

And such hard work.

JETHRO

[*Sourly.*] I have been Priest in Midian for threescore years, and never wore else but camel hair and coarse wool.

AARON

From what I know of Midian, camel hair and coarse wool are the height of luxury there.

MIRIAM

[*Teasing.*] Shame on you, Jethro! Your taste is positively voluptuous! [MOSES *comes in by the large tent.*]

JETHRO

Welcome, son.

MIRIAM

[*To* MOSES.] You look tired, brother. [*She goes to him.*] Be seated here comfortably.

MOSES

Thank you, Miriam. I have come from a meeting of the Elders. They murmur against me again. It is an evil generation.

AARON

In Egypt they were discontented because they were not free. Here they are discontented because they are not slaves! There is no pleasing them.

MIRIAM

Perhaps your robe will please them, brother. [*To* MOSES.] Of what do they murmur now?

MOSES

They fear that if we stay longer here at Mount Sinai, their flocks will be consumed before we reach Canaan. I answered them, "Shame upon you, Israel. Do you doubt Jehovah? Can it be that He has brought you out of Egypt to starve of hunger in the desert?" Some would murmur even against Him, did they not fear my anger.

JETHRO

They do not fear you enough! Some of them should be flayed alive!

MIRIAM

You are such a good man, Jethro.

MOSES

This wickedness will fall away from them. I am tired. I have judged over seventy disputes today. They quarrel like dogs over the gold and jewels which Pharaoh gave them.

JETHRO

Why do you not appoint other judges to help you?

MOSES

Because each judge would decide according to his own law, Jethro. Until the law of Jehovah has been written down, I alone must decide all disputes.

JETHRO

Go to a quiet place, my son, and write down your laws, and appoint judges to administer them with a strong hand. You carry too many burdens.

MOSES

You are right, Jethro; I have waited too long. I shall set out for Mount Sinai this very night. [MOSES *claps his hands.*]

MIRIAM

If you taught them to bear love in their hearts for one another, brother, perhaps you would not need so many laws.

MOSES

You do not understand, Miriam. It is well that men should love their neighbours, but men will not be ruled by love. Men must be ruled by Justice, by rewarding those that do good and punishing those that do evil.

JETHRO

[*Darting a venomous glance at* MIRIAM.] Even a woman should understand that.

MIRIAM

It is too simple for women, Jethro. We give up ruling our children in that way before they reach the age of ten.

MOSES

We are not children, Miriam. The will of the strong man to seek his own ends, and to set himself over his weaker neighbour, will never be curbed by his love of his neighbour. But let the strong man fear the law, let him know that what he has done to his neighbour shall be done to him; breach for breach; eye for eye; tooth for tooth; life for life; then you will find that he will deal justly with his neighbour, because he will fear the destruction which will come upon him if he breaks the law.

MIRIAM

It is no less certain that he will deal justly with his neighbour because of his love of his neighbour, brother. Most men know what love is, but many men do not know what fear is. You, brother, are the leader of Israel; you have the power of life and death over me. Yet I do not fear you, for the worst that you can do to me is to torture me or to kill me, and there are many things more precious to me than life, and many things more painful to me than torture. And there are many among us like me, who are not cowards, and will

not obey your laws if they are not just laws, no matter how much you punish us.

MOSES

There will always be rebellious spirits, sister; men who will not obey the law; but for every man who does not fear punishment, there are seven times sevenscore who do; and they will obey the law.

MIRIAM

The cringers will obey; the cowards will obey; the slaves will obey!

MOSES

You do not understand the nature of law, sister, which is to give men freedom by prohibiting them from doing as they please; for if each man did as he pleased, it would please most men to do evil, and to impose hardships upon their brothers, who would have no freedom at all. And when you speak of ruling by love, does not love impose its laws? I have made many laws for the safety and health of Israel; laws of diet, and laws to prevent the spreading of sickness. Now if a man rises up against me and disobeys these laws, not he alone, but all Israel may suffer from his act; and for this he must be punished, and not loved. The mother who rules her child by love, and does not punish it when it disobeys her, spoils the child; the man who

tries to rule the world by love, and does not punish the evil-doer, will build his palace upon quicksand; it will fall of its own weight, and crush him beneath it!

JETHRO

[*In an outburst of fury.*] Let the evil-doers be utterly destroyed! Cast out all those who commit the lesser sins, and stone to death those who commit the greater sins! The man and woman taken in adultery—let them be stoned to death! The idolator—let every bone in his body be broken, let him be stoned to death! And he who desecrates the Sabbath day—let him be stoned to death! Write down your laws! Rule with a hand of iron! Destroy the sinners! Cast out those who set their faces against Jehovah! Visit His vengeance upon them! Stone them all to death! Let not one man of them live to desecrate the land of Canaan, when Jehovah in His loving-kindness sees fit to let us dwell there!

MIRIAM

[*To* MOSES.] Do you hear the terrible echo of your own words?

MOSES

Let us cease disputing, sister. [*A servant comes in.*] Bring me a heavy cloak, and tell Agar to set off with an ass laden with food and skins of water, and to wait for me midway upon the heights of Sinai. [*The servant goes off.* MOSES *goes over to* CALEB.]

At work, Caleb? [Moses *goes to look over* Caleb's *shoulder when he sees the figure left on the table by* Shaphan.] What is this?

Miriam

Something I wish to show you, brother. [*She uncovers the figure.*]

Moses

Who has done this abominable thing?

Aaron

[*Admiring it.*] Abominable? I think it is rather well done.

Moses

[*To* Miriam.] Who made it? [*To* Caleb.] Do you know, Caleb? [Caleb *hesitates.*] Speak!

Caleb

[*Unwillingly.*] Shaphan, son of Hanin, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Moses

Go with the guard to the camp of the tribe of Benjamin, arrest him and bring him here.

Miriam

[*Indignantly.*] Arrest him? Brother!

Moses

[*To* Caleb.] Go! [Caleb *goes off.*]

JETHRO

Deliver this man to the congregation; let them all lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him until he is dead!

MIRIAM

[*Blazing with anger, to* JETHRO.] Be silent!

JETHRO

[*To* MOSES.] Are you the leader of Israel, or is she?

MOSES

Peace, Jethro. I will deal with my sister. [*To* MIRIAM.] Did you know that I had made a law ordering the destruction of all images, and forbidding the people to fashion them, with the penalty of death for disobedience?

MIRIAM

[*Indignantly.*] I heard of it a few moments ago. Why have you made such an unjust law?

MOSES

Do you cross me again, sister?

MIRIAM

Not willingly. But you are wrong, and I tell you so to your face!

MOSES

If I permit the people to make images, at the first moment of danger, the first moment of doubt, they will abandon Jehovah, and make idols out of clay, and worship them, like the Egyptians. I shall not suffer any man to practice the craft by which a graven image of any living thing or form may be created. And I shall not tolerate disobedience; whosoever disobeys the law shall suffer the full penalty. I shall cast him down and destroy him, as I cast down and destroy his handiwork. [*He takes the figure and throws it to the ground, shattering it into fragments.*]

MIRIAM

[*Furious with anger.*] How dare you do that!

MOSES

It is the law of God! I shall have the law obeyed by all.

MIRIAM

It is your law, not Jehovah's. You are not God yet!

JETHRO

Is she blaspheming against God?

MOSES

You are consumed with anger, Miriam.

MIRIAM

Are you out of your senses? Is there no end to your laws? Are none of us to do what we will, or to make what we will, without breaking a law?

MOSES

You are not to make graven images, or Israel may bow down to them and worship them.

MIRIAM

Oh—so because you do not trust the people, Israel is to be a nation without artists, a nation without sculptors. Shall I tell you, then, what will happen to Israel? We shall become a nation of traders, like the Phœnicians, a nation of money-changers, a nation of usurers!

MOSES

Rather that, than a nation of idolators.

MIRIAM

[*Passionately.*] They will be idolators! They will worship their possessions! They will worship their cattle, their land, their goods, their gold! They will worship all that they possess, and they will covet the property of their neighbours.

MOSES

I have made a law forbidding them to covet their neighbour's property.

MIRIAM

Do you think they will obey your law? They could not if they would. It is given to our people to dream; to feel the infinite beauty of the universe which God has created, and to desire to create in the image of His handiwork; and by creating, they partake of the spirit of God Himself, for thus they come closest to knowing Him and loving Him. And if you now forbid them to create those things of which they dream, then they will create possessions, for they must create! Their desires will become worldly. They will think only of possessions, of multiplying their goods and cattle, and all the force of their dreams will be prostituted to their greed.

MOSES

[*Interrupting.*] Miriam——

MIRIAM

[*Interrupting.*] Do not interrupt me. In this I am no less a prophet than you! The man with a few head of cattle will dream of a hundred; the man with a hundred will dream of a thousand. And to possess that hundred or that thousand, men will deal harshly with their fellows; there will be no love in them; and it will not avail to tell them not to covet their neighbour's property, for to make their dreams live, they will sweep aside your laws like chaff before the wind. Therefore, I pray you, brother, for the good of

Israel for all time, let them dream in images if they will.

AARON

[*Impressed.*] Yes, I believe in freedom. If a man wants to make an image, let him make it. Do not punish him unless it is badly done. Then hang him!

MOSES

Peace, Aaron. [*He addresses* MIRIAM.] I have borne patiently with you, Miriam. There is more than one good reason why I will not let anyone in Israel make images. I have noticed that the image-makers are generally the trouble-makers. They are the rebellious spirits who speak against the law. They are shiftless, lazy, grumbling, discontented; and it was always so in Egypt, where they disobeyed the priests. But the men who fear the law are of a different stamp. They are industrious; they provide for their families; they are the backbone of Israel. They will farm the land of Canaan from early dawn until the sundown, that the soil shall yield its increase and the trees shall yield their fruit. Their threshing shall reach to the vintage time, and the vintage shall reach to the sowing time, and they shall eat their bread to the full, and dwell peacefully in the land. But we have yet to pass through the wilderness; we do not know what pitfalls lie in our path. And if the people murmur against me now, when we rest here in peace before Sinai, what will

they do in the wilderness? You know our people. There are a hundred sons of Israel each one of whom thinks that he could lead us just as well as I can. To hold Israel together in the face of danger, I must have law and authority; they must fear me and obey me. So long as Israel has faith in Jehovah, my law and my authority will prevail. But if I let them make images, they will make other gods to worship, and we shall have not one leader, but a hundred; Israel will fall like a house divided against itself; our people will be scattered like lost sheep, and perish miserably in the desert. There is no more to be said, sister. I am Jehovah's servant; come what may, I shall lead Israel into Canaan and fulfill God's covenant with Abraham. The law *shall* be obeyed.

MIRIAM

I see that you are set in your purpose. But you are wrong—so utterly wrong—about the image-makers; they were the glory of Egypt, and if they broke the laws, it was a small price to pay for the good that they wrought; and I know that when men have long forgotten the shepherds and the bread-makers of Egypt, they will still remember the image-makers, whose work is eternal; and they will forget your early-rising farmers and cattle-raisers, for all their industry. That is why I say the law is a bad law, the worst you have made, because you come between the image-maker and his strongest desire; a

God-given desire; you make it a sin for him to do that from which he can derive the joy of creating, the joy which brings him closest to God; and which is of the holiest. And when you make this law in the name of God, you make him hate all laws, the good as well as the bad. And if you teach men to fear God, so that they will obey your unjust laws through fear of God, then you will bring disaster upon Israel and upon all who follow us, for whomsoever men fear, they come to hate; and they will come to hate God!

JETHRO

How long must we listen to this woman's talk? In my house, women did not talk. They worked, and bore children. [CALEB *comes in past the large tent, followed by* SHAPHAN, *who is led between two soldiers with spears.*]

MOSES

[*To* CALEB.] Bring him here! [CALEB *beckons to the soldiers, who bring* SHAPHAN *before* MOSES.] Shaphan, son of Hanin, did you know of the law against the making of graven images? [SHAPHAN *holds his head high and does not answer.*] Why did you not obey it, Shaphan? The law ordered the destruction of all images.

MIRIAM

The law of Egypt ordered the destruction of all

male children, brother. Why did our mother not destroy you?

MOSES

Speak, Shaphan.

SHAPHAN

Let me return to Egypt.

MOSES

What, to Egypt? To bondage?

SHAPHAN

I curse the day we left! What if I was a slave? I was honoured there as a sculptor. I worked to my heart's content in the Great Temple.

MOSES

[*Sternly.*] Where dwelled the gods of your enemies!

SHAPHAN

Is Jehovah my God, when, because of Him, I may no longer work at my craft? I would that Israel had a hundred gods, that I might makes images of them all.

JETHRO

Blasphemer! Let him be stoned to death!

MOSES

The punishment of him who denies his God, is death.

SHAPHAN

[*Laughs.*] Death? Is what you offer life? I am not afraid of death.

MIRIAM

[*Interceding with* MOSES.] Brother, Shaphan has spoken rashly. It was I who disobeyed your law. When the figure was mine, I should have destroyed it.

MOSES

Shaphan should have destroyed it. The law shall be obeyed.

MIRIAM

Let him return to Egypt, brother.

MOSES

Do not intercede for him, Miriam. I will brook no interference from you.

MIRIAM

[*Stepping towards* SHAPHAN.] If you send this man out to the congregation to be stoned to death, I will go with him; I will shield his body with my body, and the stoners shall kill me before they kill him. Will you send him and me out to die?

MOSES

Stand away from him. What is he to you?

MIRIAM

A brother—as you are. [*She goes over to* MOSES.] I remember, brother, when we were children together in the Palace. You made a doll of clay for me, and painted it, and gave it to me on my birthday. Was that a sin? Yet Shaphan has done no more than that.

MOSES

He has broken the law.

JETHRO

Let him pay the penalty! Deliver him to the congregation!

MIRIAM

Forgive him for my sake, brother. If I have crossed you, I have always loved you! You are still the child I placed in the rushes, still the boy I taught in the Palace! Show mercy to Shaphan!

MOSES

[*Remembering.*] I owe you my life, Miriam. I give you his. But he may not remain here with the others, to corrupt them with his blaspheming.

MIRIAM

Thank you, brother. Do you hear, Shaphan? You are free.

SHAPHAN

Thank you, Miriam.

MIRIAM

Where shall you go?

SHAPHAN

I will set out with my wife and children towards Egypt.

JETHRO

The land of abomination! May your flesh rot upon your bones.

SHAPHAN

[*To* JETHRO.] Give me rather rotting flesh and a hundred gods, than one god and a sour stomach like yours! Farewell, godliness! Farewell, righteousness! [SHAPHAN *goes off past the small tent.*]

JETHRO

Blaspheming dog! You are too soft, my son. Had the law against images been written down, and known to Shaphan, he would have had no excuse.

MOSES

[*Takes his cloak.*] I shall set out for Mount Sinai at once.

MIRIAM

[*Sighs.*] Ah me! You are so stiff-necked. [*She helps him into his cloak.*] Wrap up warmly, brother. You know how weak your chest is.

MOSES

How often must I tell you, sister, that my chest is not weak?

MIRIAM

They say that from the top of Mount Sinai one can see the waters of the Red Sea like a silver banner streaming in the moonlight.

JETHRO

Your brother will not go there to look at the view.

MIRIAM

Is that to be a sin, too? "Thou shalt not look at a view"?

MOSES

[*To* CALEB.] Get me some flat tablets of stone, and a good hard chisel. [CALEB *goes off past the large tent.*]

MIRIAM

What, are *you* going to make a graven image?

MOSES

[*Going off.*] I shall inscribe the laws of Israel

upon tablets of granite, so that they shall endure for all time.

MIRIAM

You mean, brother, so that no one may change them!

MOSES

Why should they change? Right will always be right, and wrong will always be wrong. [*He goes off.*]

AARON

I'm glad he is chipping them in stone. If he were going to write them on papyrus, we would have a million.

MIRIAM

Aaron, Moses has become a fanatic.

AARON

He has. . . . But why bother? Jehovah be praised, there's only one Prophet in the family! I shall go to see Chinanz the robemaker. Tell me, Miriam, do you not think it disgusting that the High Priest should actually kill the sacrificial animals on the altar? I had intended to ask Moses to change the ceremony. If I wear my new robe, it will soon be covered with stains.

MIRIAM

Why ask him? Are you not the High Priest? [CALEB *comes in past the large tent.*]

CALEB

[*To* AARON.] Some of the Elders are outside the gates of the Tabernacle, and seek to speak with Moses.

MIRIAM

Moses has set out for Mount Sinai.

AARON

Tell them the High Priest will see them in his stead. [CALEB *goes off.* AARON *sits on* MOSES' *throne.*] Not at all comfortable, sister.

MIRIAM

Thrones never are.

AARON

I begin to understand Moses. If I were always as uncomfortable as this, I should pass laws to make everybody else uncomfortable, too. [CALEB *comes in followed by five* ELDERS. *They each carry a small but heavy leather sack, and approach* AARON *timidly.*]

CALEB

[*To* AARON.] These Elders ask leave to speak with you.

AARON

[*With assumed hauteur.*] Tell them, Caleb, that they may speak with me.

CALEB

You may speak with him.

FIRST ELDER

[*A stocky, dull, stupid man.*] Jehovah bless thee, Aaron, our High Priest! Lo, a calamity has come upon us. We stay here in the wilderness and eat our cattle. Tell us, O fountain-head of wisdom, what we are to do?

AARON

[*To* CALEB.] Tell them to stop eating then.

CALEB

You are to stop eating them.

THIRD ELDER

[*A sharp, keen-eyed old man.*] Are we then to live on the air, like the insects?

AARON

[*To* CALEB.] Tell them that this must await the return of Moses.

CALEB

In that case you had better speak to them yourself.

AARON

[*Getting off the throne.*] What is it you want of me, friends?

FIRST ELDER

We have had a meeting of the Elders, O High Priest; we have heard of the law against graven images. We came to ask Moses for leave to make one more image.

MIRIAM

[*With keen interest.*] The Elders protest against the law?

FIRST ELDER

No, Miriam, it is because of our cattle. Our flocks diminish each day; we shall soon starve.

SECOND ELDER

Let me explain.

FIRST ELDER

No, let me.

FIRST ELDER

In the land which is watered by the Jordan——

SECOND ELDER

About five hundred years ago, in the plains of Canaan——

THIRD ELDER

The cattle of our forefathers increased plentifully——

[*Together.*]

MIRIAM

[*Putting her hands to her ears.*] Quiet! Quiet! Elders, let one of you speak and the rest be silent.

THIRD ELDER

Let me speak. Hear me, Aaron, and you, too, Miriam. [*He rubs his hands.*] Why should we lose all our cattle, when by making the image of a Golden Calf, our cattle will increase? Can you answer that, eh? In the time of our forefathers, they made a Golden Calf, and every cow gave twins, and every ewe gave triplets. And why not? Can you answer that, eh? And now our leader Moses makes a law so that we cannot have a Golden Calf. What for? Can you answer that, eh? And now we want to make a Golden Calf, and why not? Can you answer that, eh? When the people have given all their gold and all their jewels, which they had of the Egyptians, and have asked us to bring them here to you, and here they are, eh? [*He points to the sacks which they are carrying.*] To make into a Golden Calf, eh? And why not? [*Triumphantly.*] Can you answer that, eh?

MIRIAM

Let me see the jewels. [*Each of the* ELDERS *pours the contents of a sack on to the table.*] And the children of Israel are willing to give up all this gold and treasure, over which they have quarrelled and disputed so long, to make a Golden Calf?

THIRD ELDER

What can we buy with the gold in the wilderness? Can you answer that, eh?

SECOND ELDER

In the wilderness our gold is worth nothing, our cattle are worth everything.

THIRD ELDER

[*Weighing a chain in his hand.*] No, Shammeil, gold is gold anywhere.

AARON

Do you wish to worship the Golden Calf?

THIRD ELDER

Why should we worship the Golden Calf? Is not Jehovah our God? The Golden Calf will bring increase to our cattle. And why not?

MIRIAM

Go to the gates of the Tabernacle, Elders. My brother and I will consult together, and he will come to you there.

FIRST ELDER

Speak for us, Prophetess.

SECOND ELDER

Let us give her these beads. [*He takes some beads*

and hands them to her.] Accept our gift, Prophetess.

MIRIAM

[*Laughing, to* AARON.] Are they trying to bribe me?

FIRST ELDER

[*Aside to* THIRD ELDER.] Shall we take the jewels with us?

THIRD ELDER

[*Shrugs his shoulders.*] Are they worth anything? [*To* AARON *and* MIRIAM.] Farewell, Prophet! Farewell, Prophetess! [*The* ELDERS *go off muttering together, leaving the gold and jewels.*]

MIRIAM

[*To* AARON.] Aaron! We may yet save Israel.

AARON

Save Israel?

MIRIAM

Yes. And not only Israel, but your costume, too!

AARON

Save my costume? Good. But how?

MIRIAM

Why not do as the Elders ask, make an image of the Golden Calf, and instead of killing a calf as a

sacrifice to Jehovah, offer the Golden Calf in its place?

AARON

Offer the image, instead of the animal? But Moses will be furious!

MIRIAM

Surely if you offer the Golden Calf as a sacrifice to Jehovah, that is not idolatry.

AARON

[*Dubiously.*] No—perhaps you are right, sister.

MIRIAM

Are you afraid of Moses?

AARON

Not exactly afraid—still, he does like to have his own way.

MIRIAM

You are High Priest, Aaron. If the people give up their gold, over which they have disputed so often, that will please Moses, and why should you refuse to take it? [*She mimics the* THIRD ELDER.] Can you answer that? Let us ask Shaphan, before he goes to Egypt, to make a Golden Calf.

AARON

I used to be rather good at that sort of thing my-

self, in my young days. Do you remember that cat I made out of clay at Per-Ramses?

MIRIAM

Cat? But it was a dog, was it not?

AARON

It looked rather like a dog, but it was a cat, I assure you.

MIRIAM

It was not badly done. Go to the Elders, Aaron, and tell them you will make it.

AARON

Very well. Oh, Miriam——

MIRIAM

Yes?

AARON

In case they should ask you—er—oblige me, do not tell them you thought it was a dog, will you? [*He goes off.*]

MIRIAM

[*Taking her needlework.*] I may yet save Israel. Our people shall adorn the Temple with images and paintings, to quicken life to deeper beauty for those who worship there, so that they will be content with beauty, and will multiply the making of beautiful works. [*She kneels in prayer.*] God of Israel, be

Thou my guide! Lift the veil from before my brother Moses, that he may not deny Thy children beauty; that he may lead them by the love they bear each other. Give him faith in their love, that his law-making may cease, and put it into his heart to rule in the name of Thy loving-kindness, and not in the sign of laws, not in the sign of commandments, not in the sign of punishment.

CURTAIN

THIRD INTERLUDE

Mount Sinai.

MOSES *is seated upon the ground, chipping with his chisel at a flat slab of stone. As he chips, voices are heard in rhythm to his blows upon the stone.*

A DEEP VOICE

Thou shalt not!

A PIPING VOICE

Thou shalt not!

A WOMAN'S VOICE

Thou snalt not!

A GRUFF VOICE

Thou shalt not!

A DEEP VOICE

Thou shalt not!

ANOTHER WOMAN'S VOICE

Thou shalt not!

A WHINING VOICE

Thou shalt not!

A COMMANDING VOICE

Thou shalt not! [*More and more voices join until a chorus of all the voices begin to shout, "Thou shalt not!" in rhythm to the steady metallic chipping of the stone by* MOSES. *This chorus increases in volume until it becomes a rhythmic shout, and then at its climax of volume, begins to dwindle down until it is a whisper.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE FIVE

Outside MOSES' *tent, as in the Fourth Scene; forty-one days later. The platform has been made into a rude altar, and is entirely covered with foliage and decked with fruits and wheat for the harvest festival. Upon a pedestal in the centre of the platform stands the figure of a long-horned calf crudely wrought in gold.* MIRIAM *and a number of Israelite Maidens, dressed in diaphanous robes, are festooning the pedestal of the Golden Calf.* AARON *comes in past the large tent, wearing the costume of the High Priest, a magnificent affair, for a detailed description of which see Exodus, Chapter 28.*

AARON

[*Swelling with pride.*] How do I look?

MIRIAM

As—as iridescent as a bubble!

AARON

[*Regarding the calf.*] It does look like a calf, doesn't it?

MIRIAM

[*Reassuringly.*] Of course it does.

AARON

[*Critically.*] I think its head is just a trifle too big.

MIRIAM

You are too fastidious! You must tell the people it is a calf, and if they don't know what else it is, they will take your word for it. [*To the girls.*] Hurry! We must finish. [*They all work vigorously.* MIRIAM *and* AARON *admire the altar, as the girls go off.*]

AARON

Excellent!

MIRIAM

So much nicer than slaughtering a nice little calf.

AARON

And so much cleaner. No chance of spoiling my costume. I think that even Moses will approve of this.

MIRIAM

He has been away forty days. What can have happened to him? I am anxious. They say there are wild beasts in the mountains.

AARON

He has probably found a stone quarry, and is writing laws by the hundred. [*The sound of a gong is heard.*] It is time to begin the service. [*A servant comes in.*] Bring in the wine! [*The servant goes off, and brings in wine later.* AARON *calls to some priests behind the large tent.*] Sound the trumpets there! [*The trumpets sound and the Israelites, men, women and children, begin to come from all directions towards the altar.*]

FIRST ISRAELITE

Look! A golden calf!

THIRD ISRAELITE

What is the meaning of this?

SECOND ISRAELITE

It is in place of the flesh offerings.

FOURTH ISRAELITE

Surely this is wicked! What if Moses should come upon us?

FIRST ISRAELITE

Moses is dead! He has been eaten by wild beasts upon the mountain.

FIFTH ISRAELITE

Jehovah has deserted us!

THIRD ISRAELITE

Aye, we are left here to starve! [ABINADAB *comes in and stands near the front. The people cry:* "*What has become of our leader!*" "*Jehovah has deserted us!*" "*Why did he leave us?*" AARON *and* MIRIAM *mount the platform. The people cry:* "*Hail, Aaron!*" "*Aaron!*" "*The High Priest,*" "*Miriam.*"]

AARON

[*Silencing the people with a gesture.*] Harken unto me, O Israel. We are gathered here today to celebrate the festival of the Harvest-time.

THIRD ISRAELITE

What has become of our leader, Moses?

AARON

Moses has gone up to Mount Sinai at the command of Jehovah, where, with His help, he is writing the laws and commandments of Israel.

FIRST ISRAELITE

He is dead.

AARON

While our brother has been upon the Mount, Jehovah has appeared to my sister Miriam in a vision. Let Miriam tell you with her own lips that which

has been put into her mouth to say to you. [*He steps back and* MIRIAM *comes forward. The people cry, "Miriam, Miriam!"*]

MIRIAM

Behold, Israel, Jehovah has appeared before me in a vision, saying thus: "Say ye this to my people, the people of Israel, that they may know my commands. Do ye away with the sacrifices of blood and the burnt offerings, for it is an abomination to me that ye should kill my creatures to glorify me. Make ye instead images of gold and silver, with jewels and fine handiwork, and offer ye these images in homage to me, that through them ye may know me and the beauty of the world I have created for you." And I have obeyed this command, O Israel, and have spoken with my brother Aaron, who has made this image of a calf of gold which we shall offer this day to Jehovah, in place of a blood offering and a burnt offering, as an offering of rejoicing that He has led us out of Egypt. . . .

ABINADAB

[*In a stentorian voice.*] And left us to starve here in the desert.

MIRIAM

Be silent!

ABINADAB

I will not be silent! [*The people cry: "Aye, aye!" "Abinadab." "Let him speak!" "Let her finish."*] Hear me, Israel; Aaron has made an image of our ancient god, the Golden Calf, the god of Israel before the time of Abraham, and before the accursed Joseph led our fathers into Egypt to suffer bondage. When the Golden Calf was our god, Israel was prosperous. Our fathers dwelled in their own land. Our fathers had a multitude of cattle, and their flocks whitened the plains. The herds multiplied and the land produced, and Israel waxed fat and rich. Aye, our fathers were wealthy, with large stores and an abundance of worldly goods. And all these were lost to them, Israel, when they ceased to worship the Golden Calf. It was Jehovah who brought upon us trials and tribulations and afflicted us first by the Egyptians and now by this Moses, who lays the scourge of his laws across our backs. And shall we now offer the Golden Calf, the god of our wealth and prosperity, as an offering upon the altar of Jehovah? No! No! Lo, Jehovah has deserted us, but the Golden Calf has returned again. It is a sign! It is a miracle! [*Some of the people cry: "A miracle! A miracle!"*] Let this be a day of feasting and rejoicing in Israel! Let us dedicate this day to the Golden Calf! Let us worship the Golden Calf! [*The crowd cheers, as* ABINADAB *begins to ascend the stairs of the platform.*]

AARON

[*Confronting him.*] What is this wickedness? Do you deny God?

ABINADAB

[*Boldly.*] Jehovah is false and His prophets are false.

SECOND ISRAELITE

The old God! The Golden Calf! [*The people cry: "The Golden Calf!" "The God of Wealth!"*]

ABINADAB

[*Addressing the people.*] Who will serve Israel as Priest of the Golden Calf? [*People cry, "You, Abinadab!"*] Behold, I, Abinadab, will be your priest! Let the ceremony begin. Let the wine be served! Let the maidens unveil themselves and sing and dance before all Israel. And let rejoicings gladden our hearts! [*Servants pass the wine.*]

MIRIAM

[*Fervently.*] Would you become idolators? This shall not be, Abinadab.

ABINADAB

It shall be! Men of Israel, are we to be ruled by women? [*The people cry: "Away with her!" "Away with Miriam!" "A Woman!" Abinadab pushes* MIRIAM *away unceremoniously. The people laugh.*

Two men pinion her hands behind her. Others seize AARON *and tie his arms behind him.*] Let us sing the hymns of Ammon! A leader? Who leads? [*A little hunch-backed man runs up the steps with a goblet of wine in his outstretched hand. Slapping his knee with the other hand, and stamping his foot upon the ground, he starts to bleat a low doggerel Egyptian song, lively and obscene. There is a startled hush for a moment, then one or two other men join in, others take up the chorus until all are singing in a primitive rhythm. The men make way for women, who dance a pagan dance, the men singing and clapping their hands in unison. The maidens make obeisance to the Golden Calf.* JETHRO *comes in past the small tent.*]

JETHRO

Shame on you, idolators and blasphemers! You will all be stoned to death for this.

ABINADAB

Throw him out! [*A number of men seize* JETHRO.]

JETHRO

Let go! Idolators! Harlots! Fornicators! Blasphemers! Let me go! You will all die for this. Idolators! Blasphemers! Unclean dogs! Sons of

harlots! Let go! [JETHRO *is dragged out past the small tent.*]

FOURTH ISRAELITE

[*Withdrawing.*] Surely this is wickedness!

FIFTH ISRAELITE

Let us go away from here. [*They go off past the small tent. Cries of, "Myrra, Myrra!" are heard. A half-naked young woman comes in from behind the large tent, urged on by some young men. A space is cleared for her. She dances before the image, accompanied by the singing, the rhythmic clapping of hands, and the obscene shouts of the people. At the height of the dance there is a moment's stillness broken by a loud thunderclap. Moses comes in past the small tent.*]

MOSES

[*His arms stretched heavenward.*] Jehovah! Let Thy thunders rend the Heavens asunder! Unleash Thy lightnings! Let them flay the earth, to sear and scourge and waste these evil-doers! [*The people become a shrieking, terrified mob; many of them rush off, the others stand hypnotized.* ABINADAB *looks at* MOSES *as though he beholds a spectre.* MOSES *addresses the people.*] Now shall you feel the fury of my wrath, Israel, each one of you that has joined in this evil and corruption! [*Some of the Israelites begin to rally around* ABINADAB.]

ABINADAB

[*Inwardly quaking.*] We are not frightened by your threats. Israel will have none of you!

MOSES

Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him stand here with me! [*Several Israelites near* ABINADAB *come forward and others come in from all directions.* MOSES *addresses them.*] Put your swords upon your thighs, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour who has denied his God this day! [*Some of those who have joined* MOSES *draw swords and daggers, and attack the group around* ABINADAB. *Others run off, the women screaming. In the fracas, many of the supporters of both parties are wounded and killed.* JETHRO *comes in by the small tent and joins in the fray, urging on the soldiers who stand by* MOSES.]

JETHRO

Kill them all! Let not one escape! They are idolators, blasphemers, fornicators, harlots and sons of harlots! Beat them, stab them, kill them! An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a life for a life! [*The group surrounding* ABINADAB *becomes smaller.* MOSES *approaches the platform where* MIRIAM *and* AARON *stand pinioned.* ABINADAB *grapples with* MOSES. AARON *stands between them. A young man*

stabs ABINADAB, *who falls. The supporters of* ABINADAB *run off.*]

AARON

[*Stooping over* ABINADAB.] He is wounded!

ABINADAB

[*Rising.*] My curse upon you, Moses! Slayer of your brethren! [*Some men carry him off behind the large tent.*]

MIRIAM

[*To* MOSES.] If every man this day shall kill his brother, do you then kill your sister!

MOSES

What! Did you worship this abomination?

MIRIAM

Kill, you man of blood, if you are so eager for blood!

MOSES

[*To* AARON.] Did she take part in this? [*To soldiers.*] Loosen them.

AARON

[*As the soldiers untie his arms.*] No, brother—it was I—I made the Golden Calf; it is I who am to blame.

MOSES

What? You; Aaron! High Priest! [*To the soldiers.*] Stop! [*To* AARON.] Not were you ten times my brother should you escape your punishment for this.

MIRIAM

He lies! I bade him make it.

MOSES

You?

MIRIAM

I offered the calf on the altar of Jehovah, as a sacrifice to glorify Him; but they worshipped it instead of Jehovah! That was not my fault, but yours!

MOSES

Do you dare to blame me?

MIRIAM

[*Passionately.*] It was you who taught them to fear God; now they not only fear Him; they loathe Him; they hate Him! You have mocked Him; you have made Him the God of Commandments, and they have turned to other gods for love! You have made Him the God of Punishment, and they have turned to other gods for rewards! If you *must* punish, then punish yourself; it is you who bear the blame!

JETHRO

Cut out her blaspheming tongue!

MOSES

You dare to set yourself above me!

MIRIAM

I dare! Cut out my tongue! I shall find a way to speak! Tear me limb from limb! My flesh will cry out against you!

JETHRO

She is the cause of this. Let her be stoned to death! A life for a life!

MIRIAM

[*To* MOSES.] Carry out the law. I am not afraid.

JETHRO

She is a harlot, an idolatress! Let her die!

MOSES

[*Angrily to* JETHRO.] I decide; not you.

JETHRO

If she were your own mother, and a harlot and an idolatress, she should perish!

MOSES

I will hear no more. [*To soldiers.*] Take that idol away. Grind it to dust, strew it upon water, and let those who worshipped it, drink of it. [*Soldiers carry off the Golden Calf.* MOSES *points to* MIRIAM.] Take her away. Dress her in sackcloth. Strew ashes in her hair, and let her follow the camp. I will not look upon her face until we reach the land of Canaan.

JETHRO

Is she not to die? It is an outrage!

MOSES

Silence!

MIRIAM

I am content, brother. My heart is no longer with you. [*She goes off between two soldiers.*]

JETHRO

You are no longer fit to be our leader! You place your own family at the head of the tribes, and when they take part in this idolatry, instead of handing them over to the congregation to be stoned to death, you make light of their offence! God will punish you for showing them mercy! You are not fit to lead Israel! [*He goes off, hot with indignation.*]

AARON

What about me?

MOSES

You are a fool. Loosen him. [*The soldiers release* AARON. MOSES *turns his back upon* AARON; *he takes the tablets of stone, looks at them moodily, then shatters them to pieces on the ground.* AARON *starts.*]

AARON

What! You've broken all the commandments!

MOSES

Be off with you, you clown. [AARON *goes off.* MOSES *signs to the remaining soldiers to go; they follow* AARON.]

MOSES

[*With brooding determination.*] I shall drive them into the desert. They shall lose all their possessions. They shall forget all they have learned of the Egyptians. I shall drive them through and through the wilderness until this uncleanness has passed from them; until they come to know God in their hearts. Then, and not till then, shall they enter the Promised Land.

CURTAIN

SCENE SIX

Before the tent of MOSES *in the hills of* KADESH-BARNEA *above* CANAAN. *The background is a rocky ravine. Between two cliffs is a large opening in the rocks. A tree-trunk spans the opening, and a red curtain hung along the trunk hides the Promised Land from view. The same large tent described in the Fourth Scene stands to the left side of the curtain. There is a platform in front of the curtain, upon which stands a rude table and three stools. The platform is festooned with the branches of trees, shrubs, grain, flowers and fruit. At the side opposite the tent is a large rock.*

CALEB *is arranging the fruit upon the platform, while* AARON, *dressed in his High Priest's robes, walks around it, bustling in a very cheerful manner.*

CALEB

You are happy today, Aaron.

AARON

Well, why not? Just to look at those green things

is enough to make one cheerful, after wandering for years around and around that miserable desert. [*Grumbling.*] Supping on dates and sleeping on thistles. [*He takes some green figs from a basket.*] I am aching for the time when my old bones will rest in a peaceful spot in Canaan. [*He eats a fig.*]

CALEB

Do not eat those, Father. They are to be shown to the Elders, to tempt them into the Promised Land.

AARON

[*Biting into another fig.*] Should we not put away temptation?

CALEB

If you eat them all, we may be sent back into the desert again. [AARON *hastily puts the rest of the fruit back.*]

AARON

Do you think our people will give battle to the Amorites?

CALEB

They are hungry for land, and weary. It is as Abinadab said in Egypt. The desert is behind us. We are without food, and there is no shelter for the women and children.

AARON

I do not blame the people if they cry out against

Moses, Caleb. Has he not always called it "The Promised Land"? We all thought it was going to be given to us. Yet we shall have to fight battle after battle before we actually possess it.

CALEB

How I wish I had the faith of Moses! He is like granite. Nothing can move him from his purpose. Here comes your sister, Miriam. I will welcome her. [*He goes off past the tent.* AARON *eats another fig.* MIRIAM *comes in past the tent, followed by two soldiers. She is dressed in sackcloth, embroidered in coloured wool.* AARON *dismisses the soldiers.*]

MIRIAM

Hail, brother! I am here to meet Moses!

AARON

And will you meet him, dressed in that gaily-coloured robe?

MIRIAM

Gay? It is sackcloth, such as I have worn for years. My needle was not forbidden me.

AARON

I know. But today, Miriam, when Moses will forgive you, the least you can do is to look thoroughly unhappy before the event.

MIRIAM

But I feel as happy as a young girl. Oh, those lovely green things. How fragrant they are! And what is that curtain?

AARON

I have provided a ceremony. A ceremony improves an occasion, just as a robe improves a woman.

MIRIAM

Shame! You! High Priest!

AARON

Reality, sister, is the robber of dreams. So long as men perform ceremonies, they will have illusions, and so long as men have illusions, they will have hope.

MIRIAM

And what is your plan for this ceremony.

AARON

It is simple enough. Moses will say, "Behold, O Israel, the Promised Land." Four silver trumpets will sound. Then I shall pull back the curtain, so that they may get a glimpse of the valley. I must go and arrange about the trumpets. [MOSES *comes in from behind the large rock. He does not see* MIRIAM. AARON, *bustling off, narrowly escapes running into* MOSES.]

MOSES

Where are you going?

AARON

I am going to get some trumpets, to sound when I pull back the curtain.

MOSES

This is no time for mummery, brother. I have just talked with Joshua, son of Nun. The men who have returned from spying out the land say that the Canaanites are gathering an army against us. Call the Council of the Elders. We must argue with them, so that they may be in the mood for war.

MIRIAM

[*Coming forward.*] You will find the trumpets will do that better than any arguments, brother. [AARON *goes off past the tent. The sound of a single trumpet is heard.*]

MOSES

Miriam! [*They embrace.*] Miriam, Miriam, my sister.

MIRIAM

Do you forgive me, brother?

MOSES

It is I who ask forgiveness, Miriam.

MIRIAM

I have nothing to forgive. I have thought of many things as I wandered after the camp. Your punishment gave me solitude, and with solitude came understanding. You look anxious, brother. You have not spared yourself.

MOSES

There has been no peace in my mind since I sent you away, Miriam. When I said I would not look upon your face until this moment, I poured waters of bitterness upon my own head.

MIRIAM

Strange are the ways of Jehovah. You, who gave me punishment, have received punishment, while I, whom you punished, have been rewarded. Let us not dwell upon unhappy thoughts, brother. Today you will gather in your dreams, as one gathers flowers in a garden. You must be very happy, brother.

MOSES

Yes, there is rejoicing in my heart, Miriam. Had Jehovah led us out of Egypt, and no more, it would have been sufficient. Had He led us through the wilderness and not given us His message of the Law, it would have been sufficient. But He has heaped blessing upon blessing on our heads, for now these great works of laws and commandments, which His

hand has guided mine to write, will be the laws and commandments of the land of our inheritance for all time—and behold, it is a goodly inheritance, is it not? [*He points to the fruits.*]

MIRIAM

But it is not yet ours, brother. Must not blood be shed before we possess it?

MOSES

Our cause is righteous. Jehovah will be our sword.

MIRIAM

[*Gently.*] Is our cause so righteous? Have not the people who now dwell there, possessed the land for many scores of years?

MOSES

Did we not dwell there before them? And was not the land promised to us by Jehovah?

MIRIAM

Have you not written "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's property"?

MOSES

We do not covet it for ourselves, Miriam, but for Jehovah. Is this more woman's foolishness? Have you forgotten the Golden Calf?

MIRIAM

Whose foolishness was that, brother? I wonder. [*Groups of Elders come in past the tent. They stand in front of the platform.* MOSES *takes his place at the centre of the table.* MIRIAM *sits at his left.* AARON *returns and sits at the right of* MOSES. *A Scribe sits at the end of the table.*]

MOSES

[*Addresses* ELDERS.] Are we all here? [*The* SIXTH ELDER *comes running in.*] Why are you always late?

SIXTH ELDER

[*A comical little fellow.*] It was my wife. She gave me counsel.

MOSES

Is the assemblage to be kept waiting for the words of a woman?

SECOND ELDER

[*To* SIXTH ELDER.] In fear of your wife, Habib?

SIXTH ELDER

[*Points to* SECOND ELDER'S *straggling beard.*] Your tongue is as long as your beard, Tirak, and even viler.

MOSES

[*Rises and addresses the assembly.*] Silence! Elders of Israel! Behold, you are before the land

which Jehovah promised to the seed of your forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I have sent some of the sons of Israel to spy out the land, to see what it is, whether it be good or bad; the people that dwell in it, what cities they dwell in, whether in camps or in strongholds; and what the land is, whether it be fat or lean. They have gone into the land and made plans and gathered fruits, this which is spread here before you, and have now come back to tell you what they have seen. Call them, Aaron. [Aaron *beckons to people standing behind the large rock. A group of younger Israelites, including* Shaphat, Joshua, Ammeil, Nahsi *and* Caleb *come in. They bear fruits, sheaves of corn, and other produce which they have gathered; also plans marked upon scrolls of papyrus.*]

Moses

Tell us what you have seen, Shaphat, son of Hori.

Shaphat

[*A braggartly coward.*] Brethren, in spying out the land, I met with dangers such as would curdle the blood of a mountain lion. Who shall say me "nay" if I speak of my greatness of heart——

Moses

[*Angrily.*] Speak of the land, Shaphat.

SHAPHAT

Elders of Israel, beware! The land of Canaan is filled with blood-drinking peoples—Amalakites, Jebusites, Hittites, Anathites, Nephalimites——

MOSES

Did any of you see these people?

AMMEIL

I saw some of the Nephalim, the sons of Anak; they were each six cubits high; each hair of their heads was a hissing serpent, and flames poured forth from their mouths and nostrils

AARON

[*To* AMMEIL, *ironically.*] And the wine of the country, it is excellent, Ammeil?

AMMEIL

I do not jest. We were, in our own sight, like grasshoppers.

FIRST ELDER

[*To* THIRD ELDER.] Has the Lord brought us into the land to die by the sword? [SIXTH ELDER *starts to walk off past the large rock.*]

MOSES

Where are you going?

SIXTH ELDER

Back to Egypt.

FOURTH ELDER

[*Catching the* SIXTH ELDER *by his robe and pulling him back.*] You shall not go back unless we all go back.

THIRD ELDER

Why should Jehovah deal with you more justly than with us?

SECOND ELDER

Yes. Justice. Let us all go back.

CALEB

[*Stepping forward commandingly.*] Silence! Fear not, Israel. I, too, spied out the land. It is true that the dwellers there are strong, but are we not strong, too? Their men are soft from the easy ways of the cities, while ours are lean and supple as young lions. Let us go up against them at once, brethren. We are well able to possess the land.

JOSHUA

[*A forceful young man.*] Hear me, Elders, Caleb speaks the truth. Are not our regiments of young men able to withstand even twice their number? Let the captains call the regiments, and we will go out against them. We will eat them in a mouthful, for

their defense is removed from them. The Lord is with us. The Lord will be our sword.

CALEB

Let us not doubt, brethren. They will be bread for us.

MOSES

[*Rises.*] You have heard the words of Caleb and Joshua, all of you. Now hear mine. God commands you to fight. [*There is silence.*] Do you dare to disobey Him? [*The* ELDERS *are swayed.*]

FIRST ELDER

Let us have faith in Jehovah.

SECOND ELDER

Let us gather the tribes, and send our young men out against them!

SIXTH ELDER

Yes, let us send the young men!

[*The* ELDERS *cry:* "*We will go.*" "*We will send our regiments.*" "*The young men will fight.*"]

MOSES

There are plans of the land. Examine them so that you may all know the valleys, the hills, the barren country, and the fertile, where the soldiers may find food and shelter. [AARON *takes the maps*

from JOSHUA, SHAPHAT, *and the others, and hands them to the* ELDERS, *who examine them.*]

FIRST ELDER

[*Addressing* ELDERS.] I have looked at these plans, Elders. There has not been apportioned thereon the land which will be possessed by the various tribes and Princes of Israel. Think you, my people, the children of Judah, will go down to fight against these giants, if the barren land be given to them and the rich land to the other tribes of Israel?

SIXTH ELDER

By the time the children of Judah take their portion, there will be none for the rest of us.

THIRD ELDER

There is plenty of land for everybody—there will even be some to sell to others.

SIXTH ELDER

[*Shrugs his shoulders.*] He is talking of selling it already.

FIRST ELDER

Are not the children of Judah the greatest and strongest in war? If they go out against these people, the rich land which is watered by Jordan should be theirs.

FOURTH ELDER

[*An excitable man.*] What about Reuben? Must Reuben keep its mouth shut? Reuben, the thrifty tribe! The tribe that has saved the most cattle!

SIXTH ELDER

[*Aside.*] The tribe that has stolen the most!

FOURTH ELDER

[*To* MOSES.] While the others ate meat, Reuben ate grass, to save its cattle. Reuben has the most cattle. Should we not possess the best grazing land? [MOSES, *seeing the turn of the argument, buries his head in his hands.*]

FIRST ELDER

Judah has the most men!

FOURTH ELDER

Reuben has the most cattle!

THIRD ELDER

We have the most asses!

FIFTH ELDER

And you are their leader!

SIXTH ELDER

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Well—we have the best concubines!

FIRST ELDER

If the best land be not given to Judah, we will not fight!

FOURTH ELDER

What about Reuben? What about our cattle? [*To* FIRST ELDER.] May every hair in your beard grow inward until it chokes you, Swine of Judah!

FIRST ELDER

[*In a passion.*] Whose dog are you, that you call me unclean? [*He strikes the* FOURTH ELDER. *They grapple and fight. The* ELDERS *separate them.*]

MIRIAM

[*Reproving them mockingly.*] Elders! Elders! Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's property! Elders!

MOSES

[*To* MIRIAM.] Silence! [*He rises and addresses the* ELDERS.] Silence! All of you. [*They are quiet.*] What new iniquity is this, Israel; what new shame is upon you? Is the Promised Land a bone, that you fight together like dogs, before it has been thrown to you? Is Canaan a land of carrion that you scream over it like the vultures of the field? Behold, even as I sat here before you, the voice of

the Lord spoke to me, saying thus: "Not one man of these, the children of Israel, shall see the land I promised to their fathers—not one man, save my servants Joshua and Caleb, who are of another spirit! Tomorrow get you back into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea, and for forty years shall you wander there, until your carcasses are consumed in the desert. Only your children shall know the land which you would profane with your iniquities. [*The* Elders *cry:* "*What?*" "*Go back?*" "*We will not go!*"] Not one of you shall set your foot in the land of Canaan! Not one of you shall cross the river Jordan!"

Third Elder

[*Pointing to* Moses *and* Aaron.] Let us go against them!

First Elder

What leader have we, who would whiten the desert with our bones?

Second Elder

Let us rise against them.

Fourth Elder

Let us stone them. [*Several of the* Elders *rush towards* Moses. *The sound of trumpets is heard.*]

Moses

[*As they are about to seize him.*] Do you hear?

The Amorites! Away with you! [*The* Elders *halt in alarm. A soldier, breathless, runs in past the large tent.*]

Soldier

My Lord Moses! The Amorites have fallen upon us! Their armies, tens of thousands strong, have smitten our outposts!

Moses

Are we holding our ground?

Soldier

We are retreating!

Second Elder

Let us go down and fight! Did not Caleb say we were stronger than they?

Moses

Do not go down against them, Israel. You are outnumbered twenty to one. God is no longer with you.

Sixth Elder

[*Hastily going off past the large rock.*] For my part, I prefer the Red Sea! [*Others follow him.*]

Second Elder

I will lead Israel against the Amorites. Who will follow me? [*Some of the remaining* Elders *and*

SPIES *cry: "We will!" and follow the* SECOND ELDER *out, past the tent; others follow without enthusiasm.* JOSHUA *and* CALEB *remain.*]

MOSES

[*To* JOSHUA and CALEB.] They go to their destruction. Sound the alarm. Break up camp. Command the children of Israel to fall back into the desert, and let the captains of the regiments defend the retreat. [JOSHUA and CALEB *go off past the tent.* AARON *takes four baskets of fruits, some large melons, and branches bearing oranges. He starts to go, bending under the load.*]

MIRIAM

[*To* AARON.] What are you doing?

AARON

I might as well eat these.

MIRIAM

But you will be ill, if you eat all that!

AARON

Eat *all* this! It must last me forty years. Forty years more in the desert—dates and thistles, dates and thistles! [*He goes off behind the tent, grumbling and shaking his head.*]

MOSES

[*Stricken.*] It is an evil generation. It is the generation that knew Egypt. But their children—they will be fit to inherit the land! [MIRIAM *regards him tenderly.*] Why do you look at me so curiously, Miriam?

MIRIAM

[*Takes his hand.*] I wish that I could comfort you, Moses. Alas, you know many things, but you do not know what is written in the hearts of men!

INTERLUDE CURTAIN IS LOWERED

FOURTH INTERLUDE

The desert, twenty years later. A weary procession of Israelites, men, women and children, pass across the desert, carrying packs, pitchers and tents. Their steps are leaden and their backs bent in despair. Thus they are driven through the Wilderness for forty years. A litter passes, carried by two gaunt old men. It contains MIRIAM, *who is old and feeble.*

MIRIAM

[*Weakly.*] Halt! I pray you, halt! Where are my brothers? [*They stop and place the litter upon the ground. The Israelites continue to stream past, a dumb, hopeless, straggling mass.*] My poor people! Thus you are condemned to wander, thus and thus, over the face of the earth! [*She half closes her eyes. Some Israelite women pass and stop to pity her.*]

FIRST WOMAN

Poor Miriam. She was once beautiful!

SECOND WOMAN

[*Disbelieving.*] She—beautiful?

MIRIAM

Is that you, brothers?

FIRST WOMAN

I am a woman of the House of Judah.

MIRIAM

Help me to rise. [*The women assist her to rise.* MOSES *and* AARON *come in. Both are bent old men.*]

MOSES

What ails you, sister?

MIRIAM

My end is come upon me, brothers. I would have you with me.

AARON

Sister, you will soon be well again.

MIRIAM

No, Aaron. My brothers, I have been happy in the love you have given me. I am content to die.

AARON

Content, sister?

MIRIAM

I am at peace. Moses, brother?

MOSES

Yes?

MIRIAM

[*Gasping for breath.*] Your truth—is true for a generation, brother. Mine—is true—for eternity. Give me your hands. [MOSES *takes her hands in his.*] Ah! [*She closes her eyes.*] Where will my soul go—over the brink of life?

MOSES

[*Tenderly.*] Where you would have it go.

MIRIAM

To a great land in the Heavens . . . with music . . . dancing . . . [*Her mind wandering.*] Rejoice, Israel . . . with great temples . . . for Jehovah . . . great palaces . . . great monuments . . . Rejoice, Israel! . . . Rejoice! . . . [*She sinks.*]

AARON

She sleeps.

MOSES

[*As if to know whether she lives.*] Sleeps?

AARON

She will not awaken. [*They both kneel at her side.*]

MOSES

[*In a broken voice.*] Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, who giveth life and taketh life away.

AARON

Miriam . . . Miriam . . . Beloved sister. [*The two gaunt old men return.*]

MOSES

Carry her to the Ark of the Tabernacle. We will follow you. [*The men go off with the body of* MIRIAM. MOSES *takes* AARON'S *arm.*] Let us go on, brother.

AARON

[*Hopelessly.*] Let us go on. [*They follow the body of* MIRIAM. MOSES *with a firm tread,* AARON *wearily. The Israelites continue to throng sadly along.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE SEVEN

The heights overlooking Canaan, as in the Sixth Scene, but many years later. The tent of Moses *has disappeared, disclosing some small rocks which were behind it, and the curtain which cloaks the opening in the cliffs at the back is tattered and bleached by the sun.* Caleb, *now an aged man, is arranging stools upon the platform in the same relation to a table as in the Sixth Scene. A young* Scribe, *with writing materials, comes in past the small rocks.*

Scribe

I am here to attend the meeting of the Elders.

Caleb

You will sit here. [*He indicates the position.*]

Scribe

What is the purpose of the curtain?

Caleb

It was placed there forty years ago by Aaron, the High Priest, who died when you were a child.

SCRIBE

Forty years! Look, while the cloth has rotted, the cords are still strong. Our fathers were better craftsmen than we are.

CALEB

They learned their craft of the Egyptians. [*The* SCRIBE *pulls upon the ropes and moves the curtain slightly.*] Do not pull upon it. [*The* SCRIBE *goes to his place.* MOSES *comes in past the small rocks. He is now a very old and feeble man. He is supported by* JOSHUA *and a young man. He stands and looks at the place with great sadness.*]

MOSES

[*With emotion.*] This is the place—there sat my brother, Aaron—and there my sister, Miriam, who comforted me. [JOSHUA *leads* MOSES *to the stool, and stands supporting him.*] I thank Thee, God, that Thou hast given me strength for the days that are to come!

JOSHUA

[*Calls without.*] Sound the trumpet-call for the Elders of Israel. [*The trumpet is heard. The* ELDERS *of the new generation come in past the small rocks, and take the place which was occupied by the* ELDERS *years before. They are warlike in appearance, and carry swords and spears.* JOSHUA *addresses them.*] The blessings of God upon this

assembly, and upon its works. I speak for our leader, Moses, now old and feeble. I am not a speaker, but a soldier. The land of Canaan is weak, the people will fly before the might of Israel like chaff before the wind. It was at this place that your fathers, blinded by their greed, denied God and would not go down against the Amorites and the other dwellers in the land which is rightfully yours! Your fathers were slaves, with the souls of jackals. You are the new generation. You are like the lions of the desert! Will you follow me with the sword into Canaan? [*The* ELDERS *cry: "Aye, aye!" "Joshua, Joshua!"*]

MOSES

[*Rising and speaking in a feeble, yet commanding voice.*] Behold, O Israel, the land of thy forefathers, which the Lord thy God promised unto thy father Abraham as an inheritance! [CALEB *pulls on the cords of the curtain, which is moved to one side, and reveals the land of Canaan, a land of dazzling beauty, a mosaic of fields, pastures and hills.* MOSES *turns his head away, and covers his eyes with his hands. The* ELDERS *gather to look upon the land, exclaiming at its beauty.*]

MOSES

[*To* JOSHUA.] I will go up and look out over the

land. [CALEB *leads him up a path behind the large rock; as they go, the* ELDERS *talk together.*]

FIRST ELDER

Is it not a fair land?

FOURTH ELDER

It is grazing land.

SECOND ELDER

What is it called?

THIRD ELDER

It is the land of Jazer and Dibon. [MOSES *mounts the large rock, aided by* CALEB.]

MOSES

[*His voice breaking with emotion.*] Behold, Israel, the Lord has fulfilled His covenant. My cup is filled to the brim. Let us give thanks to God in silence. [MOSES *sinks to his knees in prayer; the* ELDERS *follow him; for some moments they pray; then they begin to talk quietly.*]

FOURTH ELDER

[*Sotto voce.*] Is not the land of Jazer and Dibon the best grazing land?

FIFTH ELDER

Let us ask whether Gad may possess it.

FIRST ELDER

Hush, Moses will hear you.

FOURTH ELDER

[*Rubbing his hands and addressing* FIRST ELDER.] Eliazar, does it not appear to you that the tribe of Reuben should possess the land of Jazer?

FIFTH ELDER

And Gad. Why not Gad?

FIRST ELDER

[*Indignantly.*] Why Reuben more than Judah?

FOURTH ELDER

Have not Reuben and Gad the most regiments? If we take this land, we shall be able to protect our weaker brothers from the desert tribes.

FIFTH ELDER

We ask for this land, not for ourselves, but to protect the weaker tribes.

FOURTH ELDER

Yes. Our love for our country. Are we not a nation?

FIRST ELDER

[*Sneers.*] Your love of country! You love the best part of the country; that which will fill your purses fullest!

FOURTH ELDER

[*Angrily.*] Dog of Judah. You are as greedy as your fathers! I say it is not for ourselves—our soldiers will protect Israel from the sons of the desert.

FIRST ELDER

Aye, if they fought. But ten men of Judah are worth a regiment of Benjamins!

FOURTH ELDER

I will show whether Benjamin will fight. [*He throws himself upon the* FIRST ELDER. *They fight.*]

JOSHUA

[*Rising and intervening.*] Will you heap ashes upon the head of our leader?

[MOSES, *disturbed in his prayer, rises, scarcely believing the evidence of his eyes and ears; memories of the* ELDERS *of the old generation overpower him; he totters, and would fall, were he not supported by* CALEB.]

MOSES

Miriam, Miriam. . . . It is as she said.

JOSHUA

[*To* MOSES.] Come, lead us, Father, and we will go down.

MOSES

[*In a broken voice.*] I shall not lead you, Joshua. Hear me, Israel. I appoint Joshua your leader. I cannot lead you further. My work is done.

JOSHUA

You will not come with us, Father?

[*The* ELDERS *cry:* "*Yes,*" "*Come with us,*" "*Lead us.*"]

MOSES

Do not ask me to lead you, Elders. I who have given judgment, am judged. I who have given punishment, am punished.

FIRST ELDER

What does he mean?

JOSHUA

[*Aside.*] Poor old man; he is so old, his mind wanders. We cannot spend time trying to persuade him to come with us. We will leave some old women here to look after him. [*Addressing the* ELDERS.] Let us waste no more time. Every moment is precious. If we strike now, and strike hard, all the land of Canaan will be ours; but we must be united; we cannot hope to win if our ranks are broken.

Therefore, the tribes of Reuben and Gad must fight with the others; and if they do, they shall inherit Jazer and Dibon.

THIRD ELDER

What about the rest of us?

JOSHUA

The land beyond Jordan is even richer than Jazer and Dibon. It shall be apportioned among you justly in accordance with the law of spoils. Come now, let this be an end to words. Will you fight, all of you?

FOURTH ELDER

[*Raises his spear.*] We will follow you and fight!

OTHER ELDERS

We will all follow you!

JOSHUA

[*Shouting to the soldiers drawn up without.*] Sound the trumpets. Captains of Battalions, form your battalions; Captains of Regiments, form your regiments. [*The repeated shouting of orders, and the sounds of drums and marching men are heard.*] Advance Guard. March! [*A troop of soldiers, with battle shields and spears, comes in past the small rocks, and marches down the ravine; the troop is followed by swordsmen and war chariots drawn by*

horses. As each soldier enters the ravine, he gives vent to a barbaric war-cry, brandishing his weapons, his eyes gleaming at the promise of rich plunder. JOSHUA, CALEB *and the* ELDERS *go down with them.* MOSES, *a lonely, broken old man, watches them pass into the Promised Land.*]

CURTAIN